

Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Citizen Participation

Typology of Applications, Opportunities and Challenges for Democratic Innovation



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TYPOLGY OF APPLICATIONS, OPPORTUNITIES
AND CHALLENGES FOR DEMOCRATIC INNOVATION

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Foreword

Citizen participation provides governments with a powerful tool to design and implement better and more effective and responsive policies while strengthening public trust. Findings from the 2023 OECD Trust Survey underscore the importance of political agency, which combines the confidence of being able to participate in politics and the confidence of one's voice being heard, as the strongest driver of citizens' trust in government. However, challenges to achieving meaningful and impactful participation in policymaking persist, including its disconnection from decision-making, limited resources and capabilities, and poorly designed or inaccessible processes. For decades, governments have leveraged digital technologies such as citizen participation platforms and other civic tech tools to address these challenges and expand the reach of participation processes. More recently, governments have also started experimenting with AI and other emerging technologies such as blockchain, and virtual and augmented reality. This report provides an in-depth analysis of the opportunities and challenges related to the use of AI tools to support and enhance citizen participation processes.

This report is a deliverable of a collaboration between the OECD and the Bertelsmann Stiftung. It leverages extensive OECD and Bertelsmann Stiftung work on innovative citizen participation and its relation to public trust, civic tech, digital government, and public sector innovation. In particular, it builds on previous OECD publications including the [*results of the 2023 OECD Trust Survey*](#), [*OECD Guidelines for Citizen Participation Processes*](#), [*Tackling civic participation challenges with emerging technologies*](#), [*Exploring New Frontiers in Citizen Participation in the Policy Cycle*](#), [*Governing with Artificial Intelligence: The State of Play and Way Forward in Core Government Functions*](#), as well as on Bertelsmann Stiftung's [*Five ideas for renewing democratic participation*](#), [*Under Construction: Citizen Participation in the European Union*](#), and [*Public AI White Paper*](#).

The report contributes to the global discussion on democracy in the digital age and on the adoption of AI in government, in particular to the OECD Reinforcing Democracy Initiative and its Action Plan on Transforming Public Governance for Digital Democracy.

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This report was initiated and conceptualised in close collaboration with the Bertelsmann Stiftung. Dr. Dominik Hierlemann, Senior Advisor; Dr. Angela Jain, Senior Project Manager; and Dr. Stefan Roch, Project Manager, provided key insights on the content, structure, and recommendations of the report.

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Executive summary

This report explores the opportunities and challenges of the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) tools to improve citizen participation. To do so, it builds on desk research and analysis of 50 AI use cases in citizen participation processes from 22 OECD member and partner countries. It proposes a Typology of applications which aims at supporting government officials and practitioners navigate the landscape of AI tools for participation based on their needs and the challenges they face. The report provides insights on emerging trends in the adoption of AI tools for participation, analyses the related risks, and outlines relevant mitigation strategies that allow governments to steer the trustworthy adoption of the technology.

Key findings

AI offers a wide range of opportunities in supporting citizen participation

AI tools can support governments and practitioners addressing some of the challenges they face in conducting citizen participation efforts by (1) improving the design and accessibility of citizen participation processes, (2) enabling the implementation of processes, including interpretation of results, at scale while preserving their quality, (3) communicating better on citizen participation processes, bridging the gap between participants and the broader public debate, and (4) reducing costs associated with citizen participation processes. This report proposes a Typology to navigate these opportunities. The Typology identifies nine types of applications of AI tools to support and improve citizen participation processes: **Information development, Sense-making, Translation, Transcription, Virtual Assistance, Moderation, Facilitation, Simulation and Architecture**. These applications support government officials, practitioners, and citizens in the various tasks and activities required to implement and take part in participatory and deliberative processes. In some cases, AI tools can enable new formats of participation altogether, or at scales not feasible without AI. For each application, the Typology explores the relevant uses of AI tools in both the front-office (the citizens-government interface) and the back-office of government (governments' internal operations). Finally, each application is analysed against its relevance in addressing the existing gaps and challenges to achieving meaningful and effective participation.

AI-powered sense-making, virtual assistance (e.g. personalised support to participants through conversational interfaces), and translation tools stand out as the most widespread. Among the different types of citizen participation processes, deliberative processes constitute a lively field of experimentation with AI tools, in particular to improve live facilitation activities and to enable deliberation at scale.

Beyond citizen participation processes, AI presents relevant opportunities to support the implementation of broader open government policies and practices, including access to information, government communication, and the protection of civic space. New and future developments in the technology encourage a reflection on more cutting-edge and emerging practices at the intersection of AI and participation, such as possible uses of AI agents in citizen participation processes and human-AI policymaking.

Governments around the world are already using AI tools to design and implement citizen participation processes taking place at all levels of governance. However, like other types of government AI efforts, the adoption of AI mostly occurs on an *ad-hoc* basis or through pilot initiatives. While the local government level drives this emerging trend, a growing number of national governments are developing coordinated strategies or tools to integrate AI in their participatory processes.

The use of AI in citizen participation entails risks and implementation challenges

Deploying AI tools in citizen participation processes does not come without risks and challenges. Building on the analysis carried in the OECD Report *Governing with Artificial Intelligence: The State of Play and Way Forward in Core Government Functions*, this report distinguishes between risks and implementation challenges and focuses on their respective implications in the use of AI applied to citizen participation. With respect to risks, it looks into:

- **Ethical risks**, such as inadequate or skewed data in AI systems, leading to inaccurate or adverse outcomes, the lack of transparency and explainability of some AI tools, the misuses of AI that might undermine the civic space, and the effects of all previous elements on the depth and quality of participation and deliberation.
- **Operational risks**, such as overreliance on AI systems, hallucinations, privacy and data concerns, and cyber threats, which might result in reduced quality of participation and further erosion of public trust.
- **Exclusion risks**, including the danger of widening digital, language, and societal divides.
- **Public resistance risks**, including the potential impact on citizens' trust.
- **Inaction risks**, corresponding to the missed opportunities of non-adopting AI system when relevant.

Beyond risks, governments also face **organisational and institutional challenges**. These are related to the integration of AI in government operations. These challenges include existing gaps in skills and literacy, overreliance on AI systems, inadequate investments, and scaling of practices and tools. Key recommendations

This report suggests a list of actions for governments to create the right conditions to benefit from the opportunities offered by AI tools to improve citizen participation processes while mitigating the risks. Consistent with the OECD Framework for Trustworthy AI in Government, governments should:

- Establish guardrails to anticipate and manage risks associated with AI adoption in citizen participation, including: adopting fair and transparent AI systems and associated governance and processes by ensuring compliance with democratic values, the rule of law, and the protection of the civic space, closing data divides, and consider adopting open-source, open standards and open weights models when relevant. Moreover, governments should act to prevent exclusion by offering low-tech alternatives for citizens with limited digital access while improving AI literacy. Finally, governments should be transparent in their use of AI in participation to prevent public resistance.
- Strengthen relevant enablers to overcome key implementation challenges of AI systems for citizen participation, including by raising awareness and building skills within government on how to use AI responsibly when designing, implementing, and participating in citizen participation processes.
- Foster engagement with citizens stakeholders in shaping and governing AI systems for participation, including by leveraging citizen participation processes to involve citizens in AI development and governance, strengthening innovation ecosystems to support co-creation platforms and communities of practice, and scaling successful pilots.

- Continue to work towards more meaningful and impactful citizen participation by addressing its institutional and organisational challenges and by improving the design and accessibility of processes beyond the use of digital tools, AI, and other emerging technologies.

1

Introduction: Citizen participation in the age of artificial intelligence

Citizen participation is a strategic asset for governments to design and deliver better policies while reinforcing citizens' trust. Governments around the world have been leveraging digital technologies to improve and expand their capacity to design and implement meaningful citizen participation processes. Artificial intelligence constitutes a new frontier of civic technologies. This chapter provides an introduction to the role of digital technologies in citizen participation, with a focus on the potential benefits related to the adoption of AI systems.

Citizen participation for more effective policies and greater public trust

By providing citizens with meaningful and impactful opportunities to participate in policy and decision-making, governments at all levels can strengthen public trust. The global challenges and disruptions faced by OECD member and partner countries in recent years have eroded citizens' trust in government. Only 39% of people report high or moderately high levels of trust, with an overall decline of 2 percentage points since 2020 (OECD, 2022^[1]; OECD, 2024^[2]). However, the feeling of political agency, defined as a combination of “feeling confident to participate in politics” and “feeling confident of being heard”, is strongly correlated with significantly higher levels of trust in governments. 69% of those who feel they have a say in government decisions report high trust in governments, as opposed to only 22% among those who do not. The gap in trust in government associated with the political agency (or the lack thereof) is wider than those associated with other social factors, such as socio-economic characteristics, education, and age. In other words, creating opportunities to reinforce political agency of citizens bears the potential of significantly improving trust in government.

Although decisions ultimately remain with elected representatives, governments can involve citizens in policymaking beyond and between elections to better understand citizens' needs, and design and implement more effective policies, enhance the legitimacy and the acceptability of their decisions, and ultimately reinforce citizens' trust (OECD, 2022^[3]; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018^[4]). Through the OECD (2017^[5]) Recommendation on Open Government, all OECD member countries and several non-members have committed to promote such engagement – defined as “all the ways in which stakeholders (including citizens) can be involved in the policy cycle and in service design and delivery” - to design and deliver better policies while reinforcing citizens' trust (OECD, 2023^[6]). This definition of citizen participation comprises a ladder of three progressive levels (OECD, 2001^[7]): information, consultation, and engagement (OECD, 2017^[5]). Citizen participation processes include a variety of methods and mechanisms, ranging from access to information, to public consultations, to participatory budgeting to representative deliberative processes. Table 1.1 provides definitions and examples for each level of the ladder of participation. Governments across OECD member countries and beyond are creating a growing number of opportunities for citizens to have a say in policymaking. The OECD has collected more than 800 cases of representative deliberative processes since 1971 (OECD, 2023^[8]), while the global network Participedia has compiled 2 272 cases of citizen participation processes since 2009 (Participedia, 2025^[9]).

Table 1.1. Levels of citizen participation in policymaking

Level	Definition	Examples of citizen participation processes
Information	An initial level of participation characterized by a one-way relationship in which the government produces and delivers information to citizens and stakeholders. It covers both on-demand provision of information and “proactive” measures by the government to disseminate information.	• Access to information • Disclosure of public data
Consultation	A more advanced level of participation that entails a two-way relationship in which citizens and stakeholders provide feedback to the government and vice-versa. It is based on the prior definition of the issue for which views are being sought and requires the provision of relevant information, in addition to feedback on the outcomes of the process.	• Townhall meetings • Public consultations
Engagement	When citizens and stakeholders are given the opportunity and the necessary resources (e.g., information, data, and digital tools) to collaborate during all phases of the policy-cycle and in the service design and delivery. It acknowledges equal standing for citizens in setting the agenda, proposing project or policy options and shaping the dialogue – although the responsibility for the final decision or policy formulation in many cases rests with public authorities.	• Citizen Science • Civic monitoring • Open innovation • Participatory Budgeting • Representative Deliberative Processes.

Note: the examples of citizen participation processes provided in this table are not exhaustive.
Source: (OECD, 2022^[3]).

Digital technologies for citizen participation

Digital technologies offer significant opportunities to enhance and mainstream citizen participation in policymaking, namely by expanding the reach of participatory opportunities and complementing existing in-person mechanisms with new forms and channels of interactions between governments and citizens (OECD, 2022^[3]). The OECD designates this field as **Civic Tech**, and defines it as “the use of digital technologies to reinforce democracy by enabling the public to be informed, participate in decision and policymaking, and increase governments’ responsiveness and accountability” (OECD, forthcoming^[10]; 2025^[11]). Digital tools are regularly used by public authorities at all levels of government to collect and analyse citizens’ contributions in consultations, to inform them about participation opportunities and in-person events, to provide learning materials, to perform online voting and to follow-up on the implementation of the results of participatory and deliberative processes (García and Al., 2023^[12]; OECD, 2023^[6]; People Powered, 2025^[13]). Among the 43 Adherents to the OECD Recommendation on Open Government, 31 have developed a government-wide participation portal to centralise information on past, present, and future participation opportunities (OECD, 2023^[6]). For example, Portugal developed [Participa.gov](https://participa.gov.pt), its one-stop-shop platform to enable citizen to take part in all government-led participatory processes. Beyond central governments, regions and cities across OECD member countries are at the forefront of democratic innovations, including through the deployment and at times the development of their own digital platforms for citizen participation. Since 2011, the city of Reykjavik, Iceland has been using the platform Better Reykjavik based on the open-source software Your Priorities (OECD Observatory on Public Sector Innovation, 2010^[14]), while in 2016 Madrid and Barcelona in Spain deployed their participatory platforms Decide Madrid and Decidim Barcelona (OECD, 2022^[3]), respectively based on the open-source software Consul and Decidim. Governments are also using digital tools for participation to complement processes that take place primarily in person. Box 1.1 showcases the experience of the Forum Against Fakes, a hybrid participatory process, organised in Germany in 2024 by the Bertelsmann Stiftung,

Box 1.1. The Forum Against Fakes in Germany

In 2024, the German Foundation Bertelsmann Stiftung designed and implemented the Forum Against Fakes in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of the Interior of Germany, to involve citizen in addressing the consequences of intentionally spread false or misleading information in society. This hybrid participatory process included a deliberative assembly of 120 randomly selected citizens from all parts of Germany and a digital platform designed by Make.org. Three online consultations were conducted in parallel of the work of the deliberative assembly to: (1) collect themes and proposals in relation to the question “Fakes and the manipulation of information: what should we do to protect ourselves and our democracy?” before the beginning of the in-person citizens’ assembly, (2) provide feedback on provisional recommendations proposed by the members of the assembly, and (3) vote on the final recommendations. In total, nearly 424,000 citizens participated, submitting more than 3,300 proposals and comments and casting more than 1,5 million votes. The process generated 28 concrete measures to implement 15 recommendations, which were presented to the Federal Ministry of the Interior.

Source: (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024^[15]).

Governments are also exploring relevant uses of AI and emerging technologies to improve and enhance citizen participation. The OECD defines emerging technologies as those “characterised by rapid development, evolution, novelty and uncertainty in trajectory and impact” (OECD, 2024^[16]). AI and emerging technologies such as blockchain and augmented or virtual reality (AR-VR) are among the

technologies that generate opportunities to address citizen participation challenges (OECD, 2025^[17]). For example, the city of Eindhoven in the Netherlands partnered with Eindhoven University of Technology to use Virtual Reality to engage with citizens in urban planning (Dane et al., 2024^[18]), while Bellpuig in Spain, a municipality of about 5,000 inhabitants, conducted a local referendum allowing citizens to safely vote online through the blockchain based tool Vochain (Vocdoni, 2022^[19]). While the uptake of technologies such as blockchain and AR-VR has remained limited (OECD, 2025^[17]), the use of AI tools for citizen participation is a growing trend.

The potential of AI tools for participation

The OECD has adopted the following definition for AI: “an AI system is a machine-based system that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments. Different AI systems vary in their levels of autonomy and adaptiveness after deployment.”¹ Box 1.2 provides more details on the different types of AI systems in a historical perspective.

Box 1.2. The evolution of AI

Early AI systems

The evolution of AI began in the 1950s with Alan Turing's foundational question about machine intelligence. Early AI systems were rules-based, relying on programmed "If-then" logic (if a condition, then an action) to simulate intelligent behaviour. These systems required extensive human input and are still used today, such as in robotic process automation (RPA), though their limitations have led some to question whether they still qualify as true AI.

Machine Learning and Deep Learning

In the 21st century, breakthroughs in the branch of AI called machine learning (ML) changed the AI landscape by enabling systems to learn from data rather than explicit programming. ML uses algorithms and statistical models to identify patterns and improve performance over time through a process called "training". The combination of ML techniques, large datasets, and powerful computing has significantly expanded AI's capabilities. Inspired by the human brain, neural networks are made up of layers of “neurons”, known as “nodes”, that process inputs with weights and biases to give specific outputs. A subset of algorithms in the area of neural networks - called deep neural networks (in the field of study and set of techniques called deep learning) - allows machine-based systems to “learn” from examples to make predictions or “inferences” based on the large amount of data processed during their training phase. The complexity of these models can make it difficult to understand their outputs and the processes leading to those.

Generative AI and Large Language Models

In 2017, Google researchers introduced a type of neural network architecture called “transformers”, which learn to detect how data elements - such as the words in this sentence - influence and depend on each other. This led to the rise of generative AI, including large language models (LLMs), such as those that power OpenAI's ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-Trained Transformer), and the development of foundation models that can be adapted for various tasks. Although transformers are often discussed, other approaches exist, especially for non-text (e.g. images, video, audio) generation, such as generative adversarial network (GANs) and diffusion models.

Emerging forms of “agentic” AI

While most AI remains “narrow” (task-focused), some experts argue that foundation models are an early form of more “general” AI that can handle a broader array of tasks. AI experts and researchers are also increasingly exploring the potential of autonomous “agentic” systems that can handle entire flows of actions with little to no human supervision. Despite their potential, these systems are still early-stage and pose specific limitations and risks. As AI grows more capable, many experts advocate for human-AI collaboration rather than full reliance on machines.

Note: The OECD primer *Hello World: Artificial intelligence and its use in the public sector* (Berryhill et al., 2019^[20]) provides details on the technical underpinnings and potential implications of AI.

Source: (OECD, 2025^[11]; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2025^[21]).

Since 2019, the OECD has been studying the use of AI in government and the broader implications of this emerging trend. This has included foundational studies of the technology behind AI and its implications by and for governments (Berryhill et al., 2019^[20]; Ubaldi, 2019^[22]); targeted analyses of specific countries (OECD/CAF, 2022^[23]); (OECD, 2024^[24]; OECD/UNESCO, 2024^[25]); and the assessment of global trends in government innovation, which often involve AI; and establishing a Framework for Trustworthy AI in Government (OECD, 2025^[11]). OECD efforts on this topic can be found on a dedicated hub for AI in Government on the OECD.AI Policy Observatory at [OECD.AI/gov](https://oecd.ai/gov).

Overall, the OECD has found that governments across OECD member countries and beyond are increasingly experimenting and mainstreaming the use of AI to improve their productivity and deliver more tailored and more timely public services (OECD, 2024^[26]; OECD, 2023^[27]). More specifically, the use of AI in the broader public sector responds to three priority objectives (OECD, 2019^[28]):

- **Productivity** with more efficient internal operations and more effective policy design, decision-making, and service delivery. For example, using predictive AI systems for more effective policy planning, automating processes for more accelerated service delivery, and boosting performance by allowing civil servants to focus less on mundane tasks and more on mission-critical activities.
- **Responsiveness** of public policies and service through enhanced design and delivery approaches that better meet evolving needs of citizens and specific communities, and through improved civic participation mechanisms. This includes offering more and more proactively personalised, citizen-centric public services.
- **Accountability** by enhancing capacity for oversight and transparency. This shift may boost overall public satisfaction and enhance the perception of government as competent, fair, and responsive, ultimately strengthening public trust in government’s capacity for innovation and transformation.

The OECD report *Governing with Artificial Intelligence: The State of Play and Way Forward in Core Government Functions* builds on extensive research and a comprehensive analysis of use cases collected across 11 government functions. The results of the analysis emphasise a strong interest among governments across OECD member and partner countries to implement AI solutions for citizen participation and open government. Twenty-nine (14.5%) of the 200 use cases analysed in the report relate to citizen participation and open government, making it most represented government function after public service design and delivery (45 cases, 22.5% of the total). The public-facing nature of public services and citizen participation processes, their horizontality across government agencies and line ministries, and the public nature of the information shared may explain why public services and citizen participation are the most represented government functions in the emerging landscape of AI adoption in the public sector (OECD, 2025^[11]).

To support governments in harnessing the benefits of AI while mitigating risks and overcoming implementation challenges, the report outlines the OECD Framework for Trustworthy AI in Government

(see Figure 4.1). The framework defines Engagement of citizens and stakeholders as one of the key pillars to ensure that the adoption of AI by governments reflects the needs of all, showing that the intersection of AI and citizen participation should be seen as a two-way street. This resonates with the OECD Framework for Anticipatory Governance of Emerging Technologies, which stresses the importance of including ethical and value-based considerations, forward-looking approaches in assessing governance needs, meaningful societal engagement, agile regulation and international co-operation when bringing a new technology into society (OECD, 2024^[16]). Although the OECD recognises AI as an “emerged” technology, these principles remain relevant to make sure that AI is developed and deployed with purpose.

This report deepens the research and analysis of the opportunities that AI tools offer to support governments and citizens when designing, implementing, communicating, and participating in citizen participation processes. It acknowledges the existing challenges of citizen participation, such as a disconnection from decision-making, as well as issues of accessibility, and scale. It also identifies where AI tools could help solve these challenges (OECD, 2025^[17]). If implemented adequately, AI tools could provide citizens with more and better opportunities to participate in policymaking, enabling governments to deliver better policies and strengthen public trust (People Powered, 2025^[13]). This report adopts the perspective of both governments and citizens as *users* of AI tools.

More specifically, it proposes a typology of applications of AI tools in support of tasks and activities that civil servants and citizens perform in the context of citizen participation. The typology, presented in Section 2, draws from desk research and from the conclusions of 50 use cases from 22 countries. Beyond task-specific AI tools, the typology provides a framework for discussing the future of AI systems applied to citizen participation in policymaking, with a focus on AI agents and “augmented collective intelligence”. Its purpose is to help governments and practitioners of participation navigate the opportunities offered by AI tools to address the challenges of citizen participation. It also acknowledges that the technology alone is not sufficient to make participation more meaningful and impactful, refusing to adopt a techno-solutionist approach.

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Notes

¹ The OECD published further guidance on the definition of AI which can help the reader understand AI systems and its components: <https://oecd.ai/en/wonk/definition>.

2 Opportunities for AI tools to improve and enhance citizen participation in policymaking

This chapter analyses the opportunities for AI to address the challenges of citizen participation. It does so by proposing a typology of AI tools to improve and enhance citizen participation. The typology identifies nine types of applications and analyses their potential to support both governments and citizens in overcoming citizen participation challenges when designing, implementing, or participating in a citizen participation process. Building on the analysis of 50 case studies from 22 countries, this chapter also showcases emerging trends and discusses cutting-edge practices.

Challenges to achieving effective citizen participation

Citizen participation opportunities are growing across OECD member countries and beyond, involving citizens at different stages of policymaking at the national and subnational levels (OECD, 2024^[29]). However, the impact of these processes on policy and decision-making is often limited or difficult to assess. To strengthen citizens' trust, providing additional opportunities for them to participate in is not sufficient. These opportunities should be meaningful and impactful, and they should hold governments accountable to their commitments.

The road to mainstreaming meaningful citizen participation is fraught with challenges. These challenges encompass a variety of dimensions: from shortcomings in the processes themselves (design, accessibility, scale) to their disconnection from their institutional environment (horizontal and vertical coordination, alignment between the “front-office” and “back-office” of participation), and finally to the deepening lack of mutual trust between governments and citizens. Understanding what lies beneath these challenges is key to identifying the areas where the use of AI can improve the outcomes and the impact of citizen participation processes.

Disconnection of citizen participation processes from policy impact and isolation from public debate

The impact of citizen participation is often hindered by its disconnection from policy and decision-making (OECD, 2025^[17]; Loisel and Rio, 2024^[30]). Moreover, the lack of feedback on the results of citizen participation processes and clear accountability mechanisms on their implementation might affect citizens' trust in their impact (OECD, 2025^[31]; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022^[32]). These elements are the result of multiple forces, including a lack of political willingness, and the absence of shared understanding of citizen participation as a right and as a core government function. In addition, citizen participation processes are often implemented as ad-hoc initiatives instead of regular mechanisms embedded in institutional processes, which can result in unclear expectations and limited commitment in the implementation of their results in policy and decision-making (OECD, 2023^[6]). Conversely, some processes are often implemented to comply with legal requirements, resulting in “tick-the-box” consultations (OECD, 2025^[31]). According to the results of the 2023 OECD Trust Survey, the majority of citizens is rather sceptical about their voice being heard by their government when participating in a citizen participation process. On average, only slightly more than one in three citizens now think that their government would change a policy in response to a majority public opinion. Fewer than one in three citizens think that their government would adopt the opinion expressed in a public consultation (OECD, 2024^[2]). Both figures have worsened on average compared to the 2021 OECD Trust Survey. Furthermore, the discussions held as part of citizen participation processes are often isolated from the broader public debate, which might hinder the legitimacy of policy outcomes that have an impact on the broader society.

Limited coordination, resources, and skills for participation

In addition to the disconnection from policy and decision making, the impact of citizen participation processes is hindered by poor coordination among institutions and across levels of governance, as well as by limited skills and dedicated resources. First, insufficient co-ordination in public institutions within and across levels of governance when organising, communicating, and implementing citizen participation processes can result in a multiplication of consultations on similar or overlapping policy issues. From the citizens' perspective, such complexity can be difficult to navigate, triggering “consultation fatigue”, and ultimately leading to reduced participation and impact. Similarly, insufficient alignment between the “front-office” and “back-office” functions of government (see Box 2.1) can weaken the design and the impact of citizen participation processes (OECD, 2025^[31]). Moreover, citizen participation requires dedicated skills, capacities, and resources in government (both human and financial) (OECD, 2023^[6]; Bertelsmann Stiftung,

2022^[32]). The absence, limited or discontinuous availability of these resources in governments might result in poorly designed and implemented citizen participation processes, ultimately undermining their impact in policymaking.

Box 2.1. Front-office and back-office of government

“Front office” functions of government include all public-facing activities such as public communications, responses to access to information requests, consultations, participatory processes and deliberative assemblies. These functions are generally more amenable to regular updates, tailoring to user needs and iterative development. With sufficient resources, the front office can be equipped to adopt new formats (in person/online), technologies (telephone/social media) and timings (synchronous/asynchronous) in response to citizen preferences.

“Back office” functions of government comprise internal processes such as public financial management and accounting, preparation of regulatory impact assessments, drafting of legislation and decrees, procurement, infrastructure planning, provision of in-service training, performance management and audit. These functions are generally ‘hard wired’ into public institutions and are often defined by specific laws or regulations, place high value on administrative certainty and are subject to strong scrutiny.

In reality, the distinction between front and back-office activities is often not always clear-cut for example, back-office activities might adjust to incorporate feedback collected through interactions with the public. However, it can be helpful to distinguish between front-office and back-office activities when describing citizen participation processes.

Governments should strive to align front and back-office on participation by adopting a citizen-centric perspective when designing, implementing, and reporting back on processes.

Source: (OECD, 2025^[31]).

Design and accessibility challenges

Citizen participation processes are meant to expand and deepen the involvement of citizens in policy and decision-making. However, the design of these processes might not be adequate to provide meaningful and wide-reaching opportunities for all members of the public to get informed, understand the policy issues at stake, and participate (OECD, 2022^[3]). The 2024 results of the OECD Trust Survey find that people with lower levels of education, younger people, and people identifying as part of discriminated groups (e.g. ethnic and linguistic minorities) systematically report lower levels of trust (OECD, 2024^[2]). As citizen participation is meant to reinforce public trust, the design and implementation of processes should aim at involving as much as possible underheard groups all the while protecting the integrity of the processes from undue influence (OECD, 2025^[17]). In addition, the impact of participatory and deliberative processes is often undermined by their limited scale. While some initiatives, such as representative deliberative processes, are designed to involve a limited number of participants, others that would benefit from broad inputs from a variety of stakeholders groups fail to mobilise a large audience, which can undermine the legitimacy of their results for policies and decisions that apply to society as a whole (Carson and Elstub, 2019^[33]).

Setting the scope: Opportunities of AI to address citizen participation challenges

With the ongoing surge in the adoption of AI tools, scholars, experts, and practitioners in the fields of innovative citizen participation and civic tech have shown a lively interest in the opportunities created by these tools (Arana-Catania et al., 2021^[34]; Asseh et al., 2025^[35]; Berdichevskaya and Baeck, 2020^[36]; Chemier and Hotsko, 2024^[37]; García and Al., 2023^[12]; Goldberg and al., 2024^[38]; McKinney, 2024^[39]; OECD, 2025^[17]; Campagnucci et al., 2024^[40]; Duberry, 2022^[41]). Numerous experiments have focused on how AI tools can improve governments' capacity to understand citizens' needs and preferences through the analysis of qualitative inputs (Romberg and Escher, 2024^[42]; Starke and Lünich, 2020^[43]), improve the quality of online debates (Zhang et al., 2023^[44]; Dos Santos, Saltz and Acosta, 2025^[45]; Hadfi et al., 2021^[46]), and enhance existing digital participation platforms (Arana-Catania et al., 2021^[34]; Goldberg and al., 2024^[38]; Small et al., 2023^[47]). Overall, the literature acknowledges the potential of AI tools to address some of the challenges faced by citizen participation, by (1) improving the design and accessibility of citizen participation processes, (2) enabling the implementation of processes at scale while preserving their quality, (3) communicating better on citizen participation processes, bridging the gap between participants and the broader public debate (4) reducing costs associated with citizen participation processes, hence improving resource allocation. The literature also converge in affirming that some of the challenges of citizen participation, particularly those related to the disconnection of citizen participation processes from policy and decision-making, cannot be addressed by AI tools not by other digital and emerging technologies (OECD, 2025^[17]). Finally, the literature discusses several common risks associated with the adoption of AI tools for citizen participation processes and stresses the importance of a careful and responsible uptake of these tools.

This report proposes a typology that goes deeper into these opportunities, highlighting how different tools can help address different challenges. However, its objective is not to simply encourage the adoption of AI tools in citizen participation process under the influence of technological hype (OECD, 2025^[17]). It is also to help governments and practitioners to identify where, when, and how AI can empower and support them. It therefore rejects the techno-solutionist approach, which sees in technology a “quick fix” for complex societal problems (Morozov, 2013^[48]; Duberry, 2022^[41]), as well as the “solutionist trap”, which encourages the adoption of technological solutions without questioning whether they are relevant in context (Selbst et al., 2018^[49]). On the contrary, the adoption of emerging technologies and AI tools in citizen participation should focus on creating opportunities for better interactions between government and citizens while promoting a healthy civic space in which civil freedoms are protected and the conditions for a thriving ecosystem of civil society organisation are met (OECD, 2022^[50]) following the same logic of more mainstream civic technologies, such as citizen participation platforms. Moreover, this report envisions the role of AI as a support tool and not as a replacement for skilled practitioners and participants (OECD, 2025^[11]). Finally, this report outlines the benefits of adopting AI tools as a means to expand citizens' political agency in policymaking, and governments' capacity to deliver effective policies in close collaboration with citizens.

A typology of AI tools to improve and enhance citizen participation

AI tools for participation vary vastly in their forms and purposes. The following Typology aims at helping policymakers and practitioners navigate these tools and their uses in this context.

The Typology analyses how AI tools can support all government and citizen interactions as part of participation processes. It includes activities performed by governments and citizens to navigate and exchange information, as well as activities related to the design, implementation, and participation in citizen participation processes. Examples of citizens navigating government information are the access to government websites on policy issues and formats of participation. Examples of governments navigating citizen information are the social listening of online discourse to assess the main views of the public on

policy priorities and options, as well as the analysis of citizen inputs, contributions, proposals, and projects submitted through formal channels of participation.

The typology builds on existing literature as well as on 50 real-world use cases from 22 countries collected through desk research. Based on this methodology, the findings in this chapter are not generalisable to the broader universe of AI uses in citizen participation. The findings do provide, however, observations rooted in real-world practice, as well as insights from the latest research. The Typology proposed is meant to navigate current AI opportunities for participation, while acknowledging that future and different practices and tools might emerge.

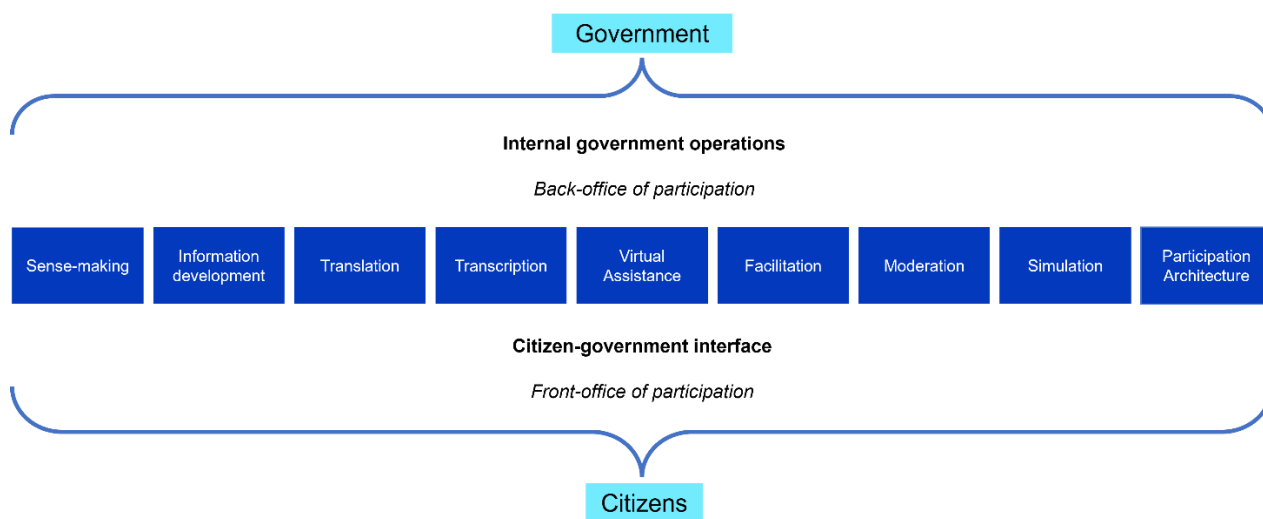
Structure of the Typology

The analysis of the literature and of use cases surfaced three criteria allowing the organisation of different existing and potential uses of AI tools to improve and enhance citizen participation. These three criteria are:

- **Types of Application:** AI tools are first classified by their applications, meaning the tasks and activities carried as part of citizen participation processes that they can perform or support. For example, AI-powered tools capable of analysing vast amounts of textual inputs and highlighting trends or performing topic modelling are grouped under the application of “**sense-making**”. Conversely, AI-powered conversational interfaces (e.g. chatbots) that support citizens in navigating information are defined as “**assistants**”. The same application can intervene at different stages of citizen participation processes and potentially be used by both governments and citizens. Conversely, multiple applications may be needed to perform a specific activity or during a specific stage. This classification builds on the AI tasks identified in the OECD Framework for the Classification of AI systems (OECD, 2022^[51]), and it adapts it to fit the context of citizen participation. The clustering of AI tools for participation by types of application presented in this report is a deliberate simplification, acknowledging that these categories are not mutually exclusive and that many tools encompass multiple functions concurrently. For instance, existing citizen participation platforms already integrate multiple tools that respond to a set of applications.
- **Front-office or Back-office:** each application is analysed for the opportunities it generates in two dimensions of citizen participation, the government-citizen interface (“**front-office**”) and the internal work of public administrations (“**back-office**”) (see Box 2.1) (OECD, 2025^[31]). For example, an AI-powered virtual assistant allowing participants to ask questions in natural language is used in the front-office dimension. Conversely a sense-making tool supporting civil servants in the analysis of citizens’ contributions to a public consultation addresses a back-office activity.
- **Potential to address citizen participation challenges:** the various applications of AI tools included in this Typology tackle distinct participation challenges. For instance, a sense-making tool increases the productivity of civil servants when analysing citizen inputs, leading to a more efficient use of resources, while a virtual assistant improves the accessibility of a process by providing information in a user-friendly manner. While multiple applications can simultaneously address multiple citizen participation challenges, this Typology focuses on the main advantages of individual applications with respect to the challenges of citizen participation.

Figure 2.1 provides a visual representation of the Typology of AI tools for citizen participation. elaboration. Table 2.1 provides more details on each type of application with respect to the front and back-office of participation.

Figure 2.1. Typology of AI tools for citizen participation



Source: Author's own elaboration.

Table 2.1. Typology of AI tools for citizen participation: Types of applications, opportunities for front and back-office activities, and potential to address citizen participation challenges

Application	Description	Front-office	Back-office	Potential to address citizen participation challenges
Information Development	AI-powered tools enabling partial automation and support in generation of text, images, and videos and adaptation to multiple formats and communication channels.	Support in drafting and illustrating content when taking part in a citizen participation process.	Support in drafting and adapting information on policy issues, modalities of participations, and outcomes of processes.	- Improving resource allocation - Enhancing accessibility
Sense-making	AI-powered tools performing analysis of large amounts of textual inputs, clustering, semi-automated annotation, identification of outliers.	Support in navigating other participants' contributions / the results of a citizen participation process.	Semi-automated analysis of citizen inputs.	Improving resource allocation
Translation	AI-powered tools for automated translation in multiple languages,	Access content and participate in one's own language.	Enable multilingual participation.	- Enhancing accessibility - Improving resource allocation

Transcription	Speech-to-text and text-to-speech.	Submit oral contributions, access information in spoken format.	Automate transcription of citizens' oral/live contributions	• Enhancing accessibility • Improving resource allocation
Virtual assistance	AI-powered chatbots / interfaces providing content in response to queries submitted in natural language.	Support in navigating information on participation opportunities.	Support in configuring citizen participation platforms.	• Enhancing accessibility • Improving resource allocation
Moderation	AI-powered semi-automated content moderation preventing spam, astro-turfing (e.g. AI-generated contributions to alter the results of a public consultation), and hate speech.	Access content and contribute to discussions in safe online environments.	Support content moderation.	• Enabling quality participation at scale
Facilitation	AI-powered virtual agents facilitating live discussions and surfacing common ground.	Participate in live facilitated discussion with level-playing field.	Enabling live participatory and deliberative processes at scale.	• Enabling quality participation at scale
Simulation	AI-powered tools generating scenarios and simulations.	Co-create and discuss policy options based on realistic scenarios.	Enable informed discussion through realistic scenarios and simulations	• Improving design
Participation Architecture	AI-powered participation platforms based on democracy affirming principles.	Participating in online environments built for constructive and democratic dialogue.	Enabling participation opportunities on ethically designed digital environments	• Improving design • Enabling quality participation at scale

Note: The Typology is meant to be updated with future applications depending on technological progress and uptake of new AI tools.
Source: Authors' own elaboration

Types of applications

Information development

Designing and implementing citizen participation processes involves creating and disseminating information and communication materials. Quality communication is a prerequisite to organising a successful and impactful participatory process (OECD, 2022^[3]). Citizens must be given the opportunity to get informed about the process, its recruitment criteria, the ways to participate, and the outcomes of their

participation (OECD, 2021^[52]). Effective information and communication efforts about these processes and their outcomes can contribute to incentivise citizens to participate and result in greater legitimacy, which, in turn, can improve public trust (Ardanaz, Otálvaro-Ramírez and Scartascini, 2023^[53]). Beside the “how”, a citizen participation process should empower all interested publics regarding the “what”, by making the policy issues accessible and by allowing participants to form their own opinion.

AI tools, namely generative AI (GenAI) text, image, and video tools, can support governments in creating information and in adapting such content to various communication channels (OECD, 2021^[52]; Lovari and De Rosa, 2025^[54]). This can free up time for other tasks related to information dissemination, such as outreach to underrepresented categories, in-person communication opportunities and informative sessions. For example, the Government Communication Service of the UK is currently implementing a strategy for the safe and trustworthy use of generative AI in public communication (GCS, 2024^[55]). Although the strategy is not specifically conceived for government communication on participation opportunities, its principles, such as “assess and tailor communications to make them increasingly accessible, helpful and relevant”, largely resonate with the objective of enhancing government outreach and improve accessibility of citizen participation processes. Information development tools are particularly relevant in contexts with limited resources dedicated to communication and participation, such as in local governments. For example, the Swindon Borough Council in the UK built the open-source AI powered tool “Simply Readable”, which leverages GenAI to adapt technical government documents into Easy Read format, improving the accessibility of their content for people with learning disabilities and visual impairment (AI.GOV.UK Knowledge Hub, 2025^[56]).

Similar tools can also support citizens when participating, for example when drafting their contributions or in illustrating them through image generation. The use of AI tools when participating should be enabled and communicated as a way to provide a level playing field for the participation of all publics, for example by reducing self-censorship when drafting (Weeks, Halversen and Neubaum, 2024^[57]), and not as a mean to replace citizens’ creativity and variety of opinions, and ultimately loss of autonomy and agency (Wihbey, 2024^[58]).

Sense-making

Citizen participation processes aim primarily at creating channels beyond and between elections for citizens to express their views on policy issues and have a say in decision-making (OECD, 2022^[3]; OECD, 2023^[6]). The collection of citizen inputs, petitions, projects or proposals in participatory processes such as public consultations or participatory budgeting poses a two-fold challenge: for governments, analysing large amounts of qualitative contributions in a fair, exhaustive, and efficient manner, while for citizens and participants, engaging meaningfully with the contributions of their peers. For example, in 2019, the French national consultation (Grand Débat) gathered 1.9 million submissions through an online platform (French Government, 2019^[59]).

The ability of AI systems in general, and of natural language processing (NLPs) models in particular, to make sense of large amounts of text can help governments analyse and summarise large volumes of citizen inputs, improving the efficiency of the process and the allocation of human resources. AI tools for sense-making allow for the automated annotation of inputs beyond the simple search for keywords, thus allowing to map recurrent topics, to cluster of opinions and ideas (Arana-Catania et al., 2021^[34]) (Berditchevskaia and Baeck, 2020^[36]), to detect outliers (Schneider and Sanders, 2023^[60]). AI sense-making tools also allow for other types of analysis, such as the sentiment analysis of the perception of a given issue (Valle-Cruz et al., 2019^[61]). Contributions to the French Grand Débat were analysed and clustered with the AI powered sense-making tool Arlequin AI (Asseh et al., 2025^[35]).

Box 2.2. AI-powered sense-making tools to analyse qualitative inputs in citizen participation processes

Enhancing local public consultations in Cambridge with Insights by GoVocal

In 2024, the city of Cambridge in the UK opened a public consultation on the Design Code (a set of guidelines that shape the physical development of an area) of its northern neighbourhoods. Cambridge residents were invited to respond to an online survey and submitted geo-localised suggestions and comments on the local citizen participation platform built by civic tech firm GoVocal. Based on the results of this first phase, the city drafted five principles for improved neighbourhood design and shared the draft with residents to collect their feedback. The city used the AI-powered sense-making tool “Insights” embedded in the platform to analyse residents’ inputs and comments and to generate a comprehensive report. The City Council’s Consultation team estimated having saved about 50% of the time needed for the analysis of qualitative contributions.

Source: (Fillet, 2024^[62]).

National Dialogues in Finland

In 2022, Finland started implementing National Dialogues, a participatory process aiming at creating a new model of social dialogue in cooperation with citizens, community and authorities, in order to build a shared understanding of societal phenomena and issues that are important to the Finnish society. The National Dialogues rely on the Timeout method, developed by the Finnish innovation lab Sitra, which consists in multiple in-person facilitated sessions involving a group between 6 and 25 participants. As the National Dialogues are becoming a regular practice, the Finnish government is currently testing the use of AI sense-making tools to support the analysis of the qualitative inputs provided by participants and inform final reports and policy briefs.

Source: (Government of Finland, 2025^[63]; Open Government Partnership, 2023^[64]).

When participating in a process, citizens might experience information overload (Perez, 2008^[65]), feeling overwhelmed by the quantity of inputs provided by other participants. This might generate a multiplicity of similar proposals that then result in weaker impact or discourage participation. AI sense-making tools can help display content to better reflect the overall trends of other participants’ contributions, flag the presence of similar inputs when drafting one’s own, or summarise the comments to a specific proposal (Arana-Catania et al., 2021^[34]).

Box 2.3. AI-powered sense-making tools to improve participants' experience

Improving public understanding of draft bills in Massachusetts - MAPLE

The State of Massachusetts in the US files more than 6,000 bills per year on average. To help citizens identifying, understanding, and commenting draft legislation on topics of interest, the non-profit organisation Massachusetts Platform for Legislative Engagement (MAPLE) deployed the MAPLE platform to help citizens of Massachusetts get informed, understand, and submit amendments and proposals for national legislation. Currently, the platform leverages AI-powered sense-making tools to provide users with bill summaries and to automatically assign topic tags to legislative proposals. The non-profit organisation is testing new features to compare and contrast similar legislation, support citizens when drafting testimonies (written feedback), analyse and summarize citizen testimonies on a same bill, and rank them to foster constructive dialogue and consensus.

Source: (MAPLE, 2025^[66]; Combaz et al., 2024^[67]).

Using NLP to help participants navigate contributions on Decide Madrid

In 2021, an experiment applied NLP techniques to improve the participants' experience on the participatory platform of the city of Madrid in Spain, Decide Madrid, based on the open-source software Consul. The experiment sought to reduce information overload by (1) suggesting other participants' proposals in line with one's interest, (2) grouping citizens by interests, and (3) summarizing the comment sections of existing proposals. Results showed reduced information overload and enhanced participants' interactions. It also highlighted the need for further fine-tuning of the AI-enhanced version of the platform, particularly for the summarization of comments. A new project to equip Consul with an AI-powered Civic Assistant was launched in early 2025 and is currently at the research stage

Source: (Arana-Catania et al., 2021^[34]; Consul Democracy, 2025^[68]).

One of the challenges faced by citizen participation processes is their isolation from broader society (OECD, 2025^[69]). AI tools can play a significant part in making the results of participatory and deliberative processes more accessible to the broader public, including journalists, civil society, elected representatives and political parties. Such enhanced accessibility could result in increased awareness and resonance of the policy issue covered by the public debate, potentially leading to greater policy impact. For example, in 2024 the Economic, Social and Environmental Committee (CESE) of France adopted the tool Panoramic.AI developed by Make.org to "open up" the proceedings and the results of the Citizen Convention on End of Life (CESE, 2024^[70]; Combaz et al., 2024^[67]). The platform allows users to formulate queries in natural language and references videos and written records from the Convention.

Translation

Language can constitute a significant barrier to the participation of linguistic minorities in each country or territory. Moreover, multilingual, supranational, and international participatory processes are often confronted with the complexity of producing information content and enabling the participation of citizens in multiple languages. AI-powered automatic translation systems are already opening new opportunities for multilingual participation. For example, the **European Commission** organised the Conference on the Future of Europe allowing participants to submit their inputs in all 24 official languages of the European Union thanks to the AI-powered eTranslation tool (European Commission, 2021^[71]; Fabbri, 2021^[72]).

For citizens, high-quality automated translation results in being able to interact with other participants writing in their own language, creating a level-playing field for meaningful dialogue. Translation is one of

the measures that governments can adopt to ensure the accessibility of citizen participation processes to underrepresented and marginalised groups, such as immigrants and linguistic minorities. The Civic Engagement Commission of the City of New York (USA) adopted the participatory platform Participate New York based on the open-source software Decidim, which allows New Yorkers to access information and participate in all languages thanks to the Google AI-powered automatic translation tool (Civic Engagement Commission, 2025^[73]). For governments, automated translation tools enable multilingual processes without increasing costs.

Translation into sign language can significantly improve the experience of citizens with hearing impairment. Governments are already adopting AI-powered video generation tools to translate voice and video messages into sign language through synthetic signers in public spaces or in the delivery of public services. For example, federal participatory platform of Brazil, Brasil Participativo, embedded the open-source AI-powered avatar VLibra that translates website contents into sign language (Brasil Participativo, 2025^[74]).

Transcription

AI tools can also contribute to lowering other barriers to access to information and to participation. For instance, AI-powered tools that transform text inputs into speech and spoken inputs into text have multiple potential uses for citizen participation. For participants with visual impairment and other reading impediments, text-to-speech tools enable them to get informed about the policy issues at stake and about the rules of the processes they participate in.

Governments and practitioners can use speech-to-text tools to collect participants' spoken contributions, during in-person events and better include citizens with insufficient digital skills or without access to digital devices. For example, in 2019, the city of Lugano (Switzerland) used "Project Debater - Speech by Crowd" developed by IBM to collect and transcribe oral contributions to a local consultation on self-driving vehicles. The tool allowed to collect and analyse around 2500 statements (Lugano Living Lab, 2019^[75]). During deliberative processes, speech-to-text tools can help facilitators keep track of the arguments raised during the sessions and better structure report drafting. In Belgium, facilitators of the Citizen Panel on Artificial Intelligence held in 2023 recorded the discussions among participants and transcribed them with an AI-powered speech-to-text tool, which enhanced the accuracy of documentation while significantly reducing the time spent for transcribing and summarising (Belgian Presidency, 2024^[76]). By using transcription tools, governments and practitioners can both expand the reach of participatory processes, as they enable new channels for citizens' inputs, and better allocate resources when conducting live activities, as they reduce notetaking of discussion points.

Virtual assistance

Citizen participation processes can be demanding of citizens, leading to self-exclusion among those unfamiliar with government information or who find it too complex to navigate. For instance, understanding and formulating an opinion about the policy issues at stake, keeping track of the calendar of specific participatory opportunities, or using digital platforms can be challenging in everyday life of ordinary citizens (OECD, 2025^[31]). Virtual assistants such as chatbots, defined as conversational interfaces supporting users in navigating information and/or providing clear paths of action, can support citizens in making sense of complex participatory processes by answering their queries in plain language. They can also send personalised notifications and reminders based on their interests (Androutsopoulou et al., 2019^[77]) (Van Noordt and Misuraca, 2019^[78]) (Cortés-Cediel, 2023^[79]). Chatbots have existed long before the advent of Generative AI, but their capabilities were limited to responding to simple rule-based queries. AI-powered chatbots now perform complex tasks and can build new communication channels between governments and citizens (Androutsopoulou et al., 2019^[77]). The city of Madrid in Spain experimented with a chatbot virtual assistant called Clara on its participatory platform Decide Madrid. In some cases, chatbot interfaces can also become a channel for easier participation, as with the open government chatbot, Chatico of the

city of Bogotá in Colombia. By adopting virtual assistance tools that support citizens in navigating and remaining informed about participation opportunities and related procedures, governments can improve resource allocation, potentially lowering the number of information requests requiring staff attention.

Box 2.4. AI chatbots to assist citizens in participation processes

Chatico Bogotá

The city of Bogotá in Colombia developed the AI-powered chatbot “Chatico”, a virtual assistant that helps residents engage with the participatory platform Gobierno Abierto Bogotá. Residents can also use it to report on matters of corruption and urban management. The city made the chatbot accessible via WhatsApp which allows users to receive “Chatico” updates directly on their devices.

Clara

The participatory platform Decide Madrid deployed the virtual assistant Clara, an AI-powered Chatbot that support citizens in understanding how to participate in online and offline participatory processes launched by the city of Madrid.

Source: (Gobierno Abierto Bogotá, 2025^[80]; Decide_Madrid, 2021^[81]).

Virtual assistants can also support civil servants in preparing contents and digital spaces for citizen participation. For example, German startup demokratie.today created an AI-powered virtual assistant allowing administrator of digital participation platforms based on the open-source software Consul to easily set up digital online participatory processes (Demokratie Today, 2025^[82]).

Moderation

The experience of digital citizen participation can be affected by harmful content or spam. All online environments enabling interactions among users, defined by some scholars “digital public squares” (Goldberg and al., 2024^[38]), such as social media platforms, have adopted content moderation policies defining their code of conduct and redress mechanisms. Online content moderation can be defined as screening, evaluating, categorising, approving or removing/hiding online material according to relevant communications and publishing policies. It seeks to support and enforce positive communications behaviour online, and to minimise aggression and anti-social behaviour, and ultimately reinforce trust and safety (Flew, Martin and Suzor, 2019^[83]). Although all forms of content moderation pose significant challenges and controversies (De Gregorio, 2020^[84]), for example related to protecting freedom of speech or avoiding the silencing of specific categories or opinions (Dias Oliva, Antonialli and Gomes, 2021^[85]), they represent an “essential, constitutional, definitional aspect of what platforms do” (Gillespie, 2018^[86]). Current online moderation on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, is often the result of automated and non-automated processes (Roberts, 2017^[87]).

In addition, government websites, including participatory platforms, are often subjected to Black Hat SEO attacks, a spam technique that targets high ranked websites on research engines to artificially inflate the web performance of other websites (Yang et al., 2021^[88]). These attacks flood institutional websites with spam content, polluting the quality of digital spaces. The presence of spam material, including harmless one, can negatively impact citizen engagement (Dasgupta et al., 2012^[89]).

AI spam detection and content moderation tools can support civil servants acting as community managers in keeping the online spaces dedicated to citizen participation safe and constructive environments for discussion and collective decisions. In the same spirit, newspapers such as the New York Times, the Financial Times and Le Monde have opted for the open-source AI tool Perspective API developed by

Google’s technology incubator Jigsaw to flag and remove toxic content from their websites’ comments sections and foster constructive dialogue among readers (Dos Santos, Saltz and Acosta, 2025^[45]).

Box 2.5. AI content moderation

TrollWall – Office of the President of the Slovak Republic

The office of former President of the Slovak Republic Zuzana Čaputová used the AI moderation tool TrollWall, a proprietary solution developed by the eponymous Norway-based startup, to shield the former president’s social media accounts from hate speech and “trolls”.

Source: (Office of the President of the Slovak Republic, 2023^[90]).

Facilitation

In participatory and deliberative processes, facilitation occupies a prominent role (Dillard, 2013^[91]; Moore, 2012^[92]). Facilitation is the practice of enabling groups to work together cooperatively and effectively, voice individual opinions in constructive ways, and work together towards consensus, mutual understanding, and shared decision-making (OECD, 2020^[93]; White, Hunter and Greaves, 2022^[94]), with a strong emphasis on ensuring that all participants are meaningfully involved in the process (Fung, 2005^[95]; Smith, 2009^[96]). The role of a facilitator is not to provide content or direct outcomes, but to guide the process in a way that allows participants to form their own opinion and contribute their knowledge, perspectives, and ideas to the discussion (Romberts and Escobar, 2015^[97]). Facilitation consists in a range of activities and techniques, from time-keeping and fair distribution of speaking time, to understanding and making sense of the discussion, to supporting participants in finding common ground and reach consensus (Stromer-Galley, 2007^[98]).

Facilitating live participatory or deliberative processes, whether they take place in person or online, is constrained by issues of scale. The literature suggests that the ideal size for a facilitated group discussion varies between 6 and 12 participants depending on the objective, the number of questions, the time allocated, and the format of the exercise (Tang and Davis, 1995^[99]; Byers, Zeller and Byers, 2021^[100]; Cortini, Galanti and Fantinelli, 2019^[101]). In deliberative processes it is generally recommended to split the group of participants in sub-groups of 6 to 8 people (White, Hunter and Greaves, 2022^[102]). According to Landemore, digital technologies and AI tools in particular could help resolve the trade-off between democratic deliberation and mass participation (Landemore, 2022^[103]).

AI tools can support participatory and deliberative processes by helping structure discussions, moderate exchanges, and clarify complex debates. For example, researchers at Google DeepMind created the Habermas Machine, an LLM-powered facilitator, which improved clarity, informativeness, fairness, and consensus-building in a UK virtual assembly of 5,734 participants (Tessler and al., 2024^[104]). Several controlled experiments have shown the benefits of AI facilitation tools to make discussions more constructive, include all participants, and build consensus on divisive policy issues (Argyle et al., 2023^[105]; Wyss and Beste, 2017^[106]; Kim et al., 2021^[107]; Hadfi et al., 2021^[108]; Ito, Hadfi and Suzuki, 2021^[109]; Zhang et al., 2023^[44]). Box 2.6 gives more examples of AI facilitation tools for participatory and deliberative processes.

Box 2.6. AI-powered facilitation

LXS 400: Chile Delibera

In 2021, the Chilean Senate partnered with the Stanford Deliberative Democracy Center and the NGO Tribu Foundation to organise a representative deliberative process involving 514 Chileans for three days to discuss policy priorities selected in a previous national consultation process, i.e. pensions and healthcare. Given the context of the pandemic, the Chilean Senate opted for an online process. The deliberative sessions took place on the Stanford Online Deliberation Platform, which uses the AI facilitator Alice to equally distribute speaking time and encourage all participants to take part in the discussion.

Source: (Fishkin et al., 2021^[110]; Senado de la República de Chile, 2021^[111]).

A safer and fairer Derry/Londonderry: Voice Matters project

In April 2025, the NGO Co-operation Ireland (Northern Ireland, UK) hosted the third edition of the Voice Matters project in Derry/Londonderry, a three-day community dialogue to reflect with residents on how to make the town safer and fairer to all. For the 2025 edition, facilitators used the open-source AI tool Echo developed by the startup Dembrane. Echo transcribes live conversations to surface discussion topics and opinions and prepare draft reports.

Source: (Co-operation Ireland, 2025^[112]; Dembrane, 2025^[113]).

EU Committee of the Regions – AI enhanced workshop on Citizen Engagement

In March 2024, as part of the Opening Conference of its 2025 Young Elected Politicians Programme, the Committee of the Regions of the European Union organised a workshop on citizen engagement between election cycles. To support the work of facilitators, the organisers tested the AI-powered tool DeliberAlde, developed by the eponymous German startup, specifically for citizen participation processes. DeliberAlde performs a variety of tasks including assisted participatory process design, anonymised transcription of discussions, summarisation, topic modelling, visualisation, and report drafting.

Source: (European Committee of the Regions, 2025^[114]).

Simulation

Public authorities at different levels of government engage the public in re-imagining and re-building physical spaces, e.g. through participatory processes that select various options for repurposing existing infrastructure (OECD, 2023^[27]). However, it is difficult to achieve a shared understanding of the potential outcomes of the policy interventions available without a way to describe or visualise them in a shared space. AI tools, especially image generation ones, unlock new opportunities to simulate and visualise future and alternative scenarios (Berigüete, 2024^[115]; Otherngrafen, Sievers and Reinecke, 2024^[116]), by improving the design and accessibility of citizen participation processes (Guridi et al., 2024^[117]). More specifically, generative AI can significantly reduce the costs of creating visual simulations by automating the design process and generating realistic outputs (Preussner et al., 2025^[118]). By using simulation tools, governments could design more engaging and meaningful participatory processes. For example, in urban planning, local governments, urban planners, and citizens can prompt in natural language, visualise, and provide feedback on different options for a given space (Williams et al., 2024^[119]). In 2023, the city of Helsinki in Finland used the AI simulator UrbanistAI to engage with citizens and local entrepreneurs on

repurposing three streets in the centre of the capital, that would remain closed to car traffic in the summer months (UrbanistAI, 2023^[120]; City of Helsinki, 2025^[121]).

AI simulation tools can also prove useful when discussing long-term policy issues requiring foresight and scenario-scanning (Fitkov-Norris and Kocheva, 2025^[122]; Polchar and Karle, 2023^[123]). Such innovation is particularly suitable to support practitioners and participants while discussing long-term policy issues (Weyl, Tang and Community, 2024^[124]). For example, the United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) Panama Acceleration Lab used UrbanistAI to involve the students at the University of Panama in a scenario-planning exercise on the consequences of raising temperatures and sea levels (Chemier and Hotsko, 2024^[37]), whilst the Civic Innovation Lab of the NGO BetaNYC developed the advocacy tool FloodGen, allowing New Yorkers to visualise the consequences of potential flood scenarios (Kittredge, 2024^[125]). Beyond image generation, AI simulation tools make it easier to create immersive 3D models and interactive virtual simulations (digital twins) (Quan, 2022^[126]; Xu et al., 2024^[127]; OECD, 2025^[128]).

Architecture of democratic digital spaces

Artificial intelligence can be used to shape digital spaces to promote constructive dialogue, foster democratic values, and harness collective intelligence (Weyl, Tang and Plurality, 2023^[129]; Ovadya, 2023^[130]; Duberry, 2022^[41]; Verhulst, 2018^[131]). Scholars have defined this application of AI as “collective dialogue systems” (Goldberg and al., 2024^[38]). Ovadya puts them into a broader category he calls “bridging systems” (Ovadya, 2023^[132]). He contrasts them with existing digital spaces whose architecture may foster mis- and disinformation, as well as polarisation (OECD, 2024^[133]). For instance, open-source platforms like Polis and Talk to the City use machine learning techniques to map participants’ positioning in online conversations with the aim of encouraging mutual understanding and nuanced perspectives on a given conversation topic (Small et al., 2023^[47]). AI-powered platforms designed to promote constructive dialogue are an emerging trend in civic technologies development (People Powered, 2025^[134]). These platforms also have a role to play in bridging small-scale citizen participation processes with the broader public debate. For example, the Austrian Citizens’ Climate Assembly of 2022 used Polis to involve larger swaths of the public in providing feedback to the first draft recommendations. About 6,000 people participated in the online discussion (Paice and Rausch, 2022^[135]).

Box 2.7. Polis for large-scale consultations

What do you think, Finland?

In 2024, the Finnish Innovation Lab Sitra organised the public consultation “What do you think, Finland?” using the open-source AI-powered platform Polis. Over 18,000 participants expressed their agreement, disagreement or neutrality on “seed” statements on a variety of policy issues and submitted their own contributions. The software, significantly improved in its UX design by DigiFinland and fine-tuned to perform adequately in the Finnish language, made it possible to map opinions and sentiments.

“What do you think, Finland?” was Sitra’s first experimentation of Polis at the national level. Since 2023, the Innovation Lab has been experimenting with Polis at the local level, partnering with the wellbeing services of the South Karelia, North Karelia, Pirkanmaa, Central Finland, and Central Ostrobothnia counties for a total of more than 12,000 participants. These pilots are part of Sitra’s broader strategy to embed citizen participation in policymaking.

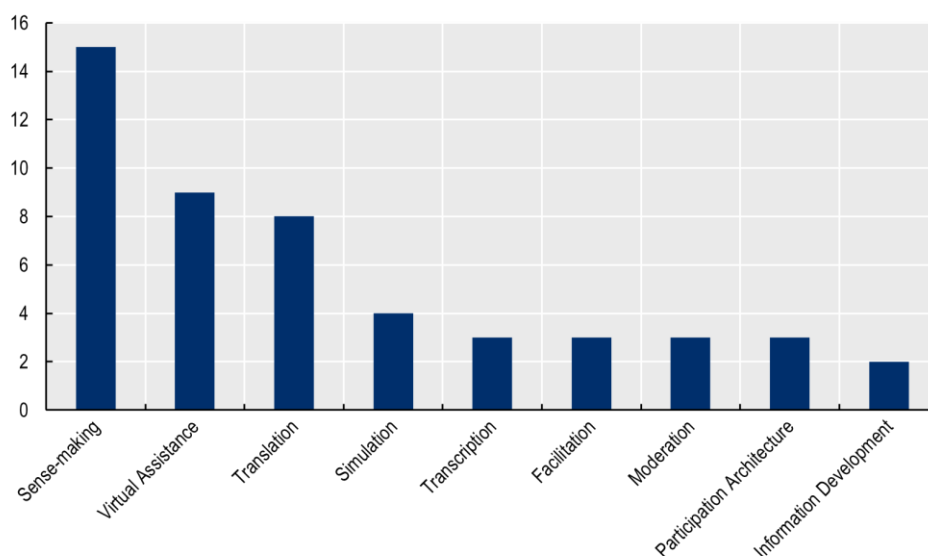
Source: (Lovio, 2025^[136]; Sitra, 2023^[137]; Eerola et al., 2025^[138]).

Emerging trends

Sense-making, virtual assistance, automated translation tools are becoming widespread

The analysis of use cases carried out for this report shows that AI sense-making, virtual assistance, and automated tools are the most widespread applications among the ones described in the Typology (see Figure 2.2). These results resonate with an in-depth analysis of 31 participation platforms conducted by Civic AI (Zisengwe and Stempeck, 2025^[139]), as well as with the trends identified by the Scope research project of the University of Münster (Campagnucci et al., 2024^[40]).

Figure 2.2. Occurrences of AI tools for participation by application



Note: N=50.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

In the case of AI translation tools, it is plausible to assume that their use for citizen participation processes is rather a natural extension of their widespread use in digital spaces. The adoption of AI virtual assistants underscores governments' efforts in providing citizens with more accessible information in a more efficient manner. Sense-making tools, especially when used to analyse citizens' inputs, contributions and proposals, seem to respond to the need of governments to improve their understanding of citizens' voice on given policy issues while enhancing the efficiency of the process. For example, the AI incubator of the UK Government is currently developing and testing the sense-making tool Consult to improve the national public consultation process (see Box 2.8).

Box 2.8. Consult by iAI UK: Improving public consultations

The UK government runs on average 600 public consultations per year. Analysing participants' inputs requires significant human and financial resources (on average, a consultation that receives 30,000 responses requires a team of 25 analysts for a period of three months). The UK government's AI incubator (iAI) sought to improve this process by creating the AI-powered open-source tool Consult. Consult uses AI and data science techniques to automatically extract patterns and themes from the responses and to turn the results into dashboards. In 2025, iAI tested Consult to analyse the responses to the Scottish's government consultation on non-surgical cosmetic procedures. Those tests gave positive results on the tool's ability to identify themes, allowing analysts to speed up the review process. Consult also helped reduce reviewer bias. However, the tool struggled to identify missing themes and analysts claimed more agency over specific steps of the process. If deployed in all consultations, Consult is estimated to save £20m and 75,000 hours per year.

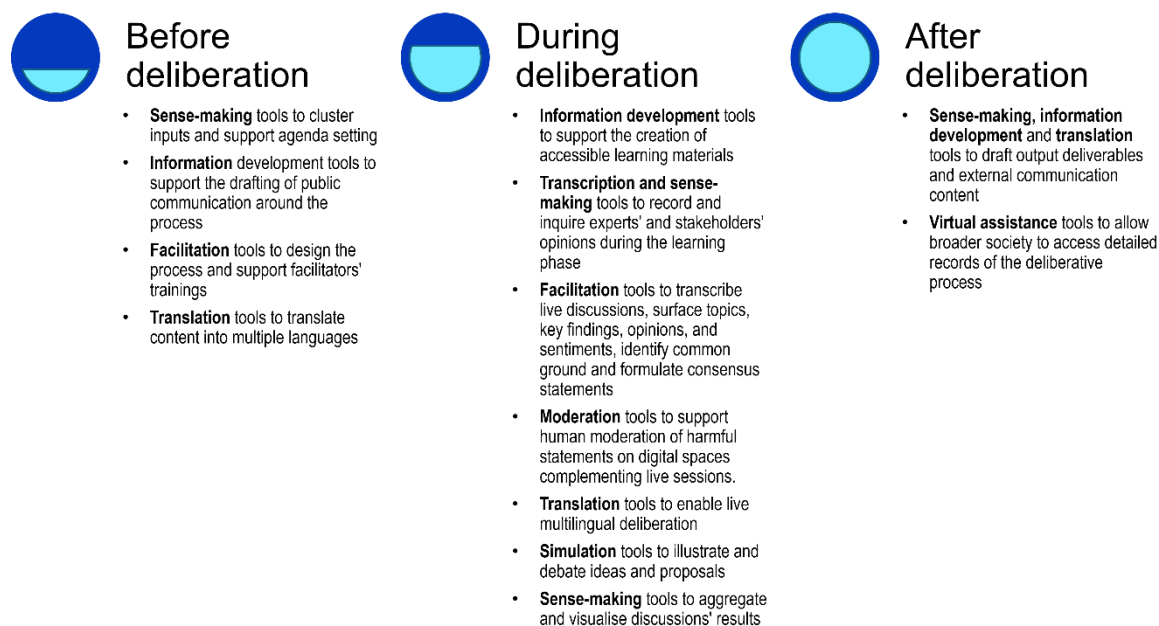
Source: (AI.GOV.UK, 2025^[140]; Makinson et al., 2025^[141]).

Using AI to enhance and scale deliberation is a priority

The literature indicates strong interest in developing and adopting AI tools to enhance representative deliberative processes (McKinney, 2024^[39]; Weyl, Tang and Plurality, 2023^[129]; Sarabi, 2025^[142]). Representative deliberative processes are citizen participation processes that bring together a group of citizens selected through sortition to represent society at large to get informed, discuss in-depth, and deliberate on a given policy issue (OECD, 2020^[93])¹. The impact and the legitimacy of these processes are often challenged by their limited scale, their isolation from the broader public debate, and the resources needed to implement them (OECD, 2025^[17]; Landemore, 2022^[103]; Ehsassi, 2024^[143]; Niemeyer, 2014^[144]). There is no unidimensional definition of “scaling” deliberation and other democratic innovations to enhance their impact. A study performed a meta-analysis of 300 democratic innovation projects to consolidate a theory of scaling including four dimensions: embedding democratic innovations in institutions and decision-making (scaling high), rooting participation in culture (scaling deep), engaging more citizens (scaling out), improving the quality of democratic innovations (scaling in) (ScaleDem, 2025^[145]). The think tank DemocracyNext adopted a similar framework to focus exclusively on representative deliberative processes and identify the areas of opportunity for AI tools (Chwalisz and McKinney, 2025^[146]), while McKinney, Schäfer and al., and Goldberg and al. mapped the potential of AI applications throughout the journey of a representative deliberative process (McKinney, 2024^[39]; Goldberg and al., 2024^[38]; Schäfer, Scheunemann and Salecker, 2025^[147]). Figure 2.3 builds on these frameworks to provide examples of relevant AI applications in deliberative processes, while Box 2.9 details an example of AI-enhanced assembly conducted with students in Deschutes County, Oregon (US).

Figure 2.3. AI-enhanced representative deliberative processes

Different AI tools can support organisers, facilitators, and communicators throughout the implementation of a representative deliberative process.



Note: The figure provides an overview of opportunities for AI tools to support the preparation, implementation, and communication of a representative deliberative process. It does not suggest adopting every tool listed for every activity.

Source: Author's own elaboration based on McKinney, Goldberg and al., and Schäfer and al., People Powered (McKinney, 2024^[39]; Goldberg and al., 2024^[38]; People Powered, 2025^[13]).

Box 2.9. AI-enhanced representative deliberative processes

Deschutes Civic Assembly on Youth Homelessness

In late 2024, civil society organisation Healthy Democracy partnered with the Central Oregon Civic Action Project, the think tank DemocracyNext, and the MIT Center for Constructive Communication to launch the Deschutes Civic Assembly on Youth Homelessness, a pressing issue in Deschutes County, Oregon (US). Healthy Democracy sent an invitation letter to 12,500 residents and selected a panel of 30 delegates assessed as representing a culturally and demographically representative panel for Deschutes County. The Assembly convened for two weekends of facilitated learning and deliberation to collectively respond to the question “*What should our priorities be for building community solutions to prevent and end youth homelessness?*” and provided 23 recommendations with more than 77% approval rate ranging from governance structures, funding suggestions, and awareness campaigns. The Assembly benefitted from the AI platform developed by the non-profit Cortico AI, which combines multiple applications (transcription, sensemaking, and information development) to support facilitators during and after the deliberative sessions.

Source: (Healthy Democracy, 2024^[148]; DemocracyNext, 2024^[149]).

Beyond application-based AI tools: AI agents and AI-human policymaking

The typology classifies tools by individual applications (tasks and activities) to provide an overview of existing tools and support governments identifying relevant opportunities when organising and implementing citizen participation processes. However, evidence from use cases shows that such tools can be combined and organised into seamless workflows tailored to support the specific needs of participatory and deliberative processes. For example, a consortium led by Consul Democracy Foundation is currently developing a suite of AI applications to enhance the open-source participation platform Consul, used by more than 250 cities and organisations around the world (Consul Democracy Foundation, 2025^[150]).

Although most of today's AI tools can be considered narrow and designed to perform a specific task, early forms of “agentic” AI are emerging (OECD, 2025^[11]). This refers to systems that can manage end-to-end processes, learn, self-optimize, and collaborate with humans and other agents with minimal human input (Ilves et al., 2025^[151]; Government Technology Agency Singapore, 2025^[152]). Simple examples include agents capable of autonomously browsing the web, interpreting the results of research, and offer selected alternatives to users. Due to their more autonomous and complex nature, agentic AI introduces new risks and challenges that should be weighed carefully (Iason et al., 2025^[153]). The current state-of-play of existing agentic applications for participation remains very limited. However, future and more advanced AI agents designed specifically to support citizen participation could help civil servants through all phases of participatory and deliberative processes, enabling a better allocation of resources, and an expansion of the capacity of governments to engage with citizens. Moreover, future AI agents owned and configured by citizens could represent them in participatory processes by voicing their pre-selected opinions and preferences (Albrecht, 2025^[154]).

Considering the fast-paced evolution of AI technologies, it is relevant to start a reflection on the impact of the use of AI in policy and decision-making through the lens of participation. Governments across OECD member countries and beyond are already using AI to make predictions and forecast future scenarios, to formulate and evaluate policy alternatives, and to optimise resource allocation (OECD, 2025^[11]). In a world of AI-enhanced policymaking, governments should seize the opportunities created by AI technologies to envision the role citizens can play as key contributors to effective and democratic decisions and policies in new ways and at greater scale. For example, the Governance Lab (US) partnered with Citizens Foundation (Iceland) to develop Smarter Crowdsourcing, a human-AI collective intelligence methodology aiming at harnessing expertise in society to respond to societal and policy issues. The methodology uses the toolkit Policy Synth, comprising several AI applications (Bjarnason, Gambrell and Lanthier-Welch, 2024^[155]).

Beyond participation: AI opportunities to foster government openness, responsiveness, and accountability

Citizen participation is one of the core principles of open government, together with transparency, integrity, and accountability. Open government is defined as a culture of governance that embraces and promotes these principles (OECD, 2017^[5]). Access to quality government information and data, effective government communication, and a protected civic space are essential prerequisites for meaningful and impactful citizen participation (OECD, 2023^[6]). AI presents relevant opportunities in all these areas. Citizens could benefit from AI interfaces to navigate the complexity of government information, while governments would expand their capacity to understand public debate, and listen to citizens' voices, including beyond and between dedicated citizen participation processes.

Helping citizens and civil society navigate the complexity of government information

AI tools can help citizens navigate the complexity of government information by making it more accessible, intelligible, and actionable (Berryhill et al., 2019^[20]; OECD, 2025^[11]):

- **Open government data:** AI-powered sense-making and virtual assistance tools can analyse and visualise open government data, improving their re-usability (Proscovia, 2025^[156]). For example, in Washington D.C. (US), the District of Columbia's Enterprise Data team is building DC Compass, an AI sense-making tools that allows users to create interactive maps based on open government data.
- **Government websites:** Virtual assistants and conversational agents embedded in government websites can guide citizens towards relevant information and services (Cardoso, 2023^[157]). For example, the Government Digital Service of the UK is currently developing GOV.UK Chat, a chatbot designed to provide information on business and trade. Findings from the experimental phase show that 70% of users found the responses useful (Gregory et al., 2024^[158]). The Italian National Social Security Institute (INPS) deployed Arianna, a virtual assistant allowing users to understand and compare pension and social security schemes (INPS, 2025^[159]).

Enhancing government transparency and accountability

Governments can use AI tools to support the enforcement of transparency regulations and provide citizens with accessible information on the implementation of policy. Likewise, citizens and civil society organisations can leverage AI tools to expand their oversight and monitoring capacities:

- **Reactive and proactive disclosure of government documents:** AI tools can support analysts to process and respond to access to information requests (reactive disclosure), and to reduce the time and cost of reviewing, classifying, and disclosing government documentation (proactive disclosure). In 2023, the US government adopted the AI-powered sense-making and information development tool MITRE to support analysts in processing and responding to FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) requests (Gast Romps, 2023^[160]).
- **Legislative archives:** AI sense-making tools can support citizens and stakeholders in understanding the background of existing regulation by improving the accessibility of parliamentary archives. The European Parliament added a GenAI powered interface to its archive's website, including documents from 1952 to 2009, allowing users to explore them online through natural language requests (European Parliament, 2025^[161]).
- **Monitoring of parliamentary activities and political debates:** AI-powered transcription, information development, and sense-making tools can be powerful allies of citizens, civil society, and journalists to stay updated with legislative and political debates. The municipalities of Argos, Xylokastro, and Chania in Greece adopted the tool OpenCouncils developed by the non-profit civic tech organisation SchemaLabs to record, transcribe, analyse, and draft reports of their City Council meetings (OpenCouncil, 2025^[162]). Similarly, the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies adopted Ulysses, a Suite of AI tools improving the tracing and the transparency of parliamentary works, including a sense-making tool to analyse citizens' feedback (Bussola Tech and Luís Kimaid, 2024^[163]).

Enabling social listening and improving government communication

Government communication is defined as the function through which government delivers information, listens, and responds to citizens in the service of the common good (OECD, 2021^[52]). Effective government communication is a powerful driver of policy acceptability (OECD, 2025^[164]) and public trust (OECD, 2024^[2]). AI sense-making and information tools can enhance the capacity of public officials to listen to citizens and tailor accessible and effective communication efforts.

- **Social listening:** AI-powered sense-making tools can help public communicators monitor and analyse online debate, audience perceptions, and attitudes before policy issues (Kumi et al., 2024^[165]; Arunachalam and Sarkar, 2013^[166]). In 2019, UN Global Pulse used transcription and sense-making AI tools to analyse radio conversations on public policy and government action in Uganda (Duberry, 2022^[41]; Rosenthal, 2019^[167]).
- **Tailored effective communication:** AI tools can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public communicators by assisting in brainstorming, automating routine tasks such as media planning, and ensuring consistency in content across communication channels (Berryhill et al., 2019^[20]). These capabilities enable communicators to better engage with their audiences and tailor messages to diverse groups. For example, the Government Communication Service of the UK developed Government Communication Service Assist, a suite of AI-powered tools based on Microsoft Co-Pilot that support all activities of government communicators. Assist is the result of two years of successful experimentation and testing (Wade, Chahal and Melton, 2025^[168]).

Enhancing government responsiveness through personalised and interactive public services

Public services represent a fundamental component of the citizen-government interface. The quality of public services has a profound impact on people's lives and is often pivotal in ensuring citizens have access to opportunities and realise their full potential (OECD, 2024^[169]). The positive perception of public services is also associated with higher levels of trust in government (OECD, 2024^[2]). Governments are leveraging AI to improve and personalise the delivery of public services. For example, Italy started using AI to sort and classify web requests to its National Institute of Social Security (INPS), which increased dramatically during the Covid-19 pandemic. With a focus on precision, more than two-thirds of emails are now automatically dispatched, with 80% accuracy (OECD, 2024^[169]).

Protecting the civic space and supporting civil society organisations

Civic space is defined as “the set of legal, policy, institutional, and practical conditions necessary for non-governmental actors to access information, express themselves, associate, organise and participate in public life” (OECD, 2022^[50]). A healthy and protected civic space is today widely recognised as an essential precondition for democracy and participation (OECD, 2023^[6]). The research and policy debate at the intersection of AI and civic space focuses primarily on the threats that AI tools pose to civil freedoms, namely automated surveillance, mis- and disinformation, privacy infringements, and censorship (OECD, 2024^[170]). Nevertheless, citizens, civil society, and human rights defenders can use AI tools to support their advocacy and data collection activities.

- **Smart crowdsourcing:** AI tools can help citizens, journalists, and civil society organisations to analyse crowdsourced and geospatial data on electoral incidents, attacks and violence against human rights defenders and peaceful assemblies (Nesta, 2021^[171]). The Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (Abraji) and Mexican data journalism nonprofit Data Crítica developed the open-source AI sense-making tool “Attack Detector,” which uses NLP to detect and monitor hate speech against journalists and political figures (Linares, 2023^[172]). Similarly, in 2018 the NGO Amnesty International collaborated with Element AI to develop a monitoring tool providing updates on death penalty cases (Wildi, Braizat and Evrard, 2024^[173]). Beyond monitoring existing data, AI tools can be used to engage with citizens in complex contexts to surface their priorities and needs. For example, between October 2020 and January 2021, the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) used the AI-powered platform Remesh to conduct five live polls to surface Libyans’ views on the country’s civil war and future perspectives (Masood Alavi, 2022^[174]).
- **Advocacy and campaigning:** AI sense-making and information development tools can support small organisations, individual citizens, and non-profit organisations to monitor the political debate

and build advocacy campaigns and communication strategies with limited resources (Civic Tech Field Guide, 2023^[175]).

- **CSO and community-lead participation processes:** Civil society organisations and self-organised communities can benefit from the applications analysed in the Typology to conduct their own participation processes and engage with their communities. For example, the CSO Silent Cry from Michigan (US), which provides mental health support to inmates, used the AI-powered platform Talk to the City to analyse the insights of a collection of video interviews with formerly incarcerated individuals to surface their challenges when reintegrating society (Talk to the City, 2023^[176]).
- **Awareness raising about citizens' rights:** AI-powered virtual assistants can play a pivotal role in informing people about their legal rights in a context-sensitive and accessible manner. For example, the Canadian non-profit organization People's Law School launched the virtual assistant Beagle+, powered by ChatGPT4 by OpenAI, to help British Columbia's citizens obtain information on their rights and legal obligations (People's Law School, 2025^[177]).

AI for electoral management

The OECD focuses on the involvement of citizens beyond electoral representation. Nevertheless, governments could get inspiration from the opportunities unlocked by AI tools in the context of elections. A report by International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) analysed how AI tools can assist Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) throughout the electoral cycle (Juneja, 2024^[178]). Before elections, AI tools can be adopted to perform voter list management, voter registration, resource allocation planning, election costs forecasting, or targeted advertising. During elections, AI tools can contribute to campaign and media monitoring, biometrics, as well as voter verification, polling place monitoring, and ballot counting (Dwyer, 2024^[179]). Finally, artificial intelligence can support post-electoral audits. The use of AI to support electoral management presents significant ethical, human rights, and practical concerns, ranging from technically difficult implementation to serious issues with electoral integrity and public trust.

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Notes

¹ The OECD understands representative deliberative processes as citizen participation processes involving a limited number of participants selected through stratified sortition (“civic lottery”) to represent the broader society. Participants are given time and means to learn about the policy issue at stake, hear from different perspective, form their own opinions and formulate recommendations based on informed deliberation. The extent to which stratified sortition succeeds in representing society is an open debate in the deliberation literature (Benade, Gölz and Procaccia, 2019^[309]; Gasiorowska, 2023^[310]; Griffin et al., 2015^[311]).

3

Mapping the risks and challenges of using AI for citizen participation

The adoption of AI tools to improve and enhance citizen participation processes entails significant risks and challenges that governments need to address. Building on the analysis included in the OECD report *Governing with Artificial Intelligence*, this chapter analyses how risks and challenges in AI adoption and scaling can affect citizen participation and open governance.

Risks and challenges of using AI for citizen participation

There is a growing literature on the risks and challenges that emerge from the adoption of AI in government (Berryhill et al., 2019^[20]; OECD, 2024^[26]; OECD, 2025^[11]; Peixoto, Canuto and Jordan, 2024^[180]; OECD, 2024^[181]) and the threats that AI poses to democracy (Manheim and Kaplan, 2019^[182]; Duberry, 2022^[41]; Jungherr, 2023^[183]). The OECD Expert Group on AI Futures identified 10 priority risks for enhanced policy focus, including misinformation and manipulation (OECD, 2024^[133]), erosion of accountability due to lack of transparency and explainability, and invasive surveillance (OECD, 2024^[181]) (see Box 3.1). As of August 2025, the OECD Observatory on AI collected nearly 8600 AI incidents and hazards since January 2022, among which more than 3,100 concerned government functions, security, and defence (OECD.AI, 2025^[184]). The OECD Report Governing with Artificial Intelligence: The State of Play and Way Forward in Core Government Functions distinguishes between risks and implementation challenges. The report clusters risks in ethical, operational, exclusion, public resistance, and risk of inaction. It also mentions several implementation challenges, ranging from skill gaps to limited scalability of pilots.

Box 3.1. AI futures priority risks

The OECD Expert Group on AI Futures put forth 10 priority risks for enhanced policy focus:

- Facilitation of increasingly sophisticated malicious cyber activity.
- Manipulation, disinformation, fraud and resulting harms to democracy and social cohesion.
- Races to develop and deploy AI systems cause harms due to a lack of sufficient investment in AI safety and trustworthiness.
- Unexpected harms result from inadequate methods to align AI system objectives with human stakeholders' preferences and values.
- Power is concentrated in a small number of companies or countries.
- Minor to serious AI incidents and disasters occur in critical systems.
- Invasive surveillance and privacy infringement.
- Governance mechanisms and institutions unable to keep up with rapid AI evolutions.
- AI systems lacking sufficient explainability and interpretability erode accountability.
- Exacerbated inequality or poverty within or between countries.

Source: OECD Expert Group on AI Futures (OECD, 2024^[181]).

However, limited attention has been devoted to how these risks and challenges translate in the context of citizen participation in policymaking (Verhulst, 2025^[185]). While technological advancement is likely to address and overcome at least some of these challenges (OECD, 2025^[11]), policymakers should be aware of their implications when deciding which AI tools they should use for participatory and deliberative processes. This chapter builds on the relevant categories of risks and implementation challenges outlined in the broader OECD work on AI in government to analyse more in depth how both apply to the adoption of AI in citizen participation.

Ethical risks

Adverse outcomes caused by incomplete or skewed data

Technology is not neutral (Hare, 2022^[186]; Floridi, 2023^[187]; Whelchel, 1986^[188]), it is the product and the reflection of the values and the structures of the societies that shape it (Khun, 1968^[189]; Huyskes, 2024^[190]). AI systems are shaped by human choices at every stage, from model selection and training data to fine-tuning and parameter adjustments (OECD, 2025^[11]). These choices can have consequences when AI tools are used to improve and enhance citizen participation processes.

Citizen participation in policymaking is meant to be a practice that preserves complexity and nuance, enabling the expression of variety of opinions and structuring societal conflict and trade-offs into democratic dialogue. Technology should empower governments and citizens by providing new opportunities for this complexity to unfold, not silence the richness of democratic debate and societal conflict through technical layers and opaque systems. AI systems carry the potential of improving government efficiency and increase its productivity, but this should not come to the cost of avoiding or reducing its efforts in engaging with citizens, in particular with those affected by the digital divide. Moreover, improper and malicious uses of AI constitute a threat to the civic space and to information integrity (OECD, 2022^[191]; OECD, 2024^[133]).

Incomplete or inadequate data embedded in AI models and tools (Joyce et al., 2021^[192]; Eubanks, 2018^[193]) can undermine the quality of citizen participation processes by resulting in skewed and imbalance outcomes, potentially eroding citizens' trust. For example, imbalanced or incomplete training data might encode political bias (Peters, 2022^[194]) and provide citizens with non-neutral assistance when researching information or drafting contributions (Tsai et al., 2024^[195]).

Undermining civic space and information integrity

The misuse of digital technologies by government to monitor, track or even silence their oppositions and the populations at large constitute a threat to civic space. (OECD, 2022^[191]). The OECD has identified invasive surveillance to be a significant risk of AI, which can undermine the free exercise of human rights and freedoms (OECD, 2024^[181]). In 2022, 6 out of the 19 AI strategies analysed in the 2022 OECD Global Report on Civic Space (Chile, Denmark, Latvia, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden) included a discussion on the impact of AI on rights, namely personal data protection, transparency and the consequences of the non-explainability of algorithmic decision making. More than half of the strategies (53%) proposed the introduction of concrete oversight and redress mechanisms (OECD, 2022^[50]).

Moreover, AI has made it easier for malicious actors to generate content and pollute the information space through deep fakes and bots (OECD, 2024^[133]; Appel and & Prietzel, 2022^[196]). With an increased use of AI to create and disseminate information, the entire information ecosystem including governments will face new questions regarding the accuracy and fairness of information, in the context of growing threats to information integrity, mis- and disinformation.

A polluted information space constitutes a challenge for democratic participation, during and between elections. In 2024, 122 national elections took place, including the European Parliament, the United States, and India. Research by the MIT and the Alan Turing institute calls attention on the “overblown” impact of GenAI on misinformation and the elections (Felix M. Simon, 2024^[197]; Stockwell, 2024^[198]), with only 19 cases of AI interference among the 112 electoral processes. Both research stress that electoral behaviour is a complex phenomenon that misinformation alone cannot change radically. Nevertheless, the Romanian elections of December 2024 were annulled by the Constitutional court following the surprise win of a candidate who used AI bots to conduct an aggressive social media campaign (Damian, 2024^[199]).

Malicious actors might use AI tools to interfere with citizen participation processes. Astro-turfing techniques, such as the generation of significant amounts of misleading contributions, can result in skewed outcomes (Verhulst, 2025^[185]).

Lack of transparency and explainability

Deep learning systems are often described as “black boxes” because their nature makes it difficult to explain how they arrive at a specific output. Their results stem indirectly from the training and inference processes, during which engineers iteratively adjust parameters until the model achieves high performance on predefined objectives (Clarke and Whittlestone, 2022^[200]). Even experts developing state-of-the-art deep learning models lack full insight into their internal decision-making processes, making it difficult to trace the origins of particular outputs or to assess the reliability of such systems using conventional evaluation methods (OECD/CAF, 2022^[23]). The inherent structure of AI systems might affect public acceptance and trust in the use of AI tools as “intermediaries” between governments and citizens in citizen participation processes.

Quality and depth of dialogue and deliberation

Inadequate or incomplete training datasets and models can affect the quality of the outputs of AI tools used to support citizen participation processes. If data is partial or incomplete, AI facilitators might not reflect correctly the depth and the variety of opinions of deliberative processes. This can result in reducing or silencing minority views. Unfair AI moderation can result in censorship of specific individuals or views on a given issue. Moreover, GenAI tools used to draft consensus statements might over-simplify the nuances of debates and propose “central options” that do not reflect the complexity of the discussion. AI models might also lack understanding of context-sensitive information. When supporting citizens in drafting and submitting written contributions, AI assistance and information development tools might affect the creativity and originality of the participants’ reflection.

To adequately support citizen participation processes, AI tools should be shaped and used to preserve the quality and nuance of exchanges and contributions. Participatory and deliberative processes are not only a powerful way for governments to co-design and then deliver more effective policies, they are also, some say primarily, about fostering empathy, mutual understanding, and consensus-building in a complex environment of interests and beliefs (OECD, 2020^[93]).

Operational risks

Overreliance on AI systems

Many people perceive the outputs of AI systems as neutral and impartial, which might encourage users to accept them as legitimate without further scrutiny. In government, this “automation bias” occurs when public organisations or civil servants rely too heavily on AI systems for decision-making or task execution. This excessive dependence can result in users failing to recognise mistakes, accepting incorrect AI outputs, and diminishing human oversight and judgment (Passi and Vorvoreanu, 2022^[201]; Klingbeil, Grützner and Schrec, 2024^[202]). The presence of hallucinations, i.e. credible AI-generated facts or answers, makes overreliance on AI systems particularly risky. In the case of citizen participation processes, overreliance on AI systems might lead for instance to skewed outputs when analysing citizen inputs (Romberg and Escher, 2024^[42]), or reduced quality of debate when using AI-powered moderation or facilitation tools.

Privacy and data governance tensions

Developing and deploying AI systems poses privacy and data governance challenges throughout the AI lifecycle (OECD, 2024^[203]). AI systems might infringe the privacy of individuals as their personal data might be part of training datasets, or retained when using the tools, or inferred by AI systems themselves (OECD, 2025^[11]). Moreover, deleting personal information from AI systems might prove technically challenging and resource intensive. These concerns could further erode citizens' trust in government and in citizen participation processes. To address such tensions, promoting further international cooperation between data privacy and AI communities can contribute to harmonised data practices with AI development and use. For example, OECD's Expert Group on AI, Data, and Privacy is exploring policy responses on data governance and privacy in the context of AI, involving experts from multiple sectors and disciplines around the world.

Exclusion risks

With governments' adoption of AI systems, the risk of exclusion of people with limited access to devices, quality internet connection, and digital literacy increases (OECD, 2025^[11]; ECNL, 2024^[204]). If they rely solely on digital and AI tools, citizen participation processes might result exclusive by design to certain groups of citizens, such as the elderly and people living in isolated areas with limited access to the internet (OECD, 2022^[3]). Moreover, imbalances in AI systems performance in different languages can affect linguistic minorities by poorly filtering their contributions and losing cultural nuances (Romberg and Escher, 2024^[42]).

Language divides

Large Language Models perform unevenly across languages. AI systems are mainly trained in English, Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese, defined “high resource languages” while other languages are underrepresented, or “low-resource languages” (Peixoto, Canuto and Jordan, 2024^[180]; Li and al., 2025^[205]). In the context of citizen participation, this means that inputs submitted in non-highly performing languages might not be processed and valued in the same way creating new democratic inequalities (Romberg and Escher, 2024^[42]).

Replacing citizen participation with simulations

The ability of AI systems to monitor debate, make predictions, and simulate scenarios might induce governments to believe that consulting and engaging with citizens will no longer be necessary. There is a growing market of AI “personae” that companies can use for market research purposes (Leoni and Strothe, 2025^[206]), it is highly plausible that similar tools will be soon available to simulate citizens (Rehan and Hassan, 2025^[207]). Although synthetic citizens could be useful in very specific contexts, for example to represent future generations in the formulation of long-term policies (Swinkels, de Vette and Toom, 2025^[208]), governments should not consider simulations a surrogate for their duty to involve citizens in their action (People Powered, 2025^[13]).

Public resistance risks

Previous failures in AI deployment have significantly impacted reputations and eroded public trust in the government's capacity to use AI responsibly. The Netherlands' “Toeslagenaffaire” (childcare benefits scandal), where an AI system wrongfully accused 26 000 families of fraudulently claiming childcare benefits due to a skewed algorithm, who were then forced to repay those benefits, resulted in severe

consequences for the people involved. Following the scandal, the government collapsed (OECD, 2023^[209]). Incidents underscore the importance of building adequate guardrails for trustworthy AI adoption in government, including strong accountability and redress mechanisms, continuous monitoring and oversight, and effective risk management. Public resistance emerged as a strong concern among the cases of AI uses in government across 11 policy functions (76% of cases analysed in the OECD Report “Governing with Artificial Intelligence”) (OECD, 2025^[11]).

Risks of inaction

Debates about AI often focus on deployment risks. However, delaying its responsible adoption and use, including in government-led citizen participation, also constitutes a risk. Such delays can result in avoidable financial and non-financial costs. Reluctance in adopting AI systems typically stems from technical limitations, legacy IT, unclear privacy/data rules, insufficient awareness of practical use cases, and the fear of “getting AI wrong” (OECD, 2025^[11]). Nevertheless, the use of AI in citizen participation processes can expand outreach, lower participation barriers, synthesise inputs at scale, and shorten feedback loops for better-informed decisions. Failing to consider these tools might result in poorer process design, more limited outreach, and in some cases even in renouncing on the implementation of processes for limited resources – which would have been made possible by delegating some tasks to AI tools.

Implementation challenges

The use of AI tools to support citizen participation is still at a formative stage, characterised by experimentation, pilots, and ad hoc initiatives rather than systematised practice. While these early efforts demonstrate the potential of AI to expand and improve democratic engagement, they also reveal significant implementation challenges, including limited availability of actionable guidance, gaps in skills and capacities within the public sector, and risks linked to market concentration and vendor lock-in.

Inadequate skills

Public officials and civil servants often lack AI literacy and capabilities, including technical capabilities to develop and maintain AI systems, literacy to adopt and use AI tools, and strategic understanding of the opportunities of AI to adapt organisations and processes (UNESCO, 2022^[210]). These gaps are particularly significant at the local level (UN Habitat, 2024^[211]). Inadequate skills are also a major barrier to the uptake of AI in government and of its limited success when adopted (OECD, 2024^[26]).

Skills gaps might also trigger other risks in the use of AI for participation, such as overreliance on AI tools, which preventing civil servants from engaging in a critical way with the technology and from flagging incorrect results (Alon Barkat and Busuioc, 2024^[212]). Finally, skills gaps can often lead to outsourcing AI tools through public procurement, both increasing the costs and resulting in lock-ins (Autio, Communigs and Elliott, 2023^[213]). In the context of citizen participation, this might exacerbate both the technological and ethical risks, undermining the quality of participatory and deliberative processes (Duberry, 2022^[41]), while hindering the opportunities for AI to address the challenge of limited financial resources.

Many pilots, limited scaling

The majority of case studies analysed in the Typology are the product of pilot or ad-hoc initiatives (32 out of 50). More broadly, OECD analysis of the use of AI in government, consistently with the discussions held in OECD Working Parties and Networks, highlights that most initiatives remain at an early stage, often taking the form of pilots or experimental projects (OECD, 2025^[11]).

In the case of citizen participation, the ad hoc nature of the adoption of AI tools intersects with the ad hoc implementation of citizen participation processes, which are often not embedded in the institutional system. Moreover, most of the cases analysed were implemented at the local level, which highlights the role of regions and cities in pushing the boundaries of democratic innovations (OECD, 2023^[6]) but also comes with the challenges of coherence and scaling to succeed implementation at the national level.

This gradual and experimental approach is valuable. The OECD has long encouraged governments to adopt new methods in a controlled, iterative way to reduce risks and costs, and to allow inevitable failures to occur early, thus generating lessons that can inform future initiatives (OECD, 2017^[214]; OECD, 2024^[215]). At the same time, it is important to recognise that the ultimate objective of most AI projects is to move beyond experimentation, and to implement and, where appropriate, scale up successful solutions (Sarabi, 2025^[142]).

Limited actionable guidance

The use of AI in citizen participation processes is a recent trend. Governments often lack actionable guidance on which opportunities exist, and which steps are needed to ensure a meaningful and responsible usage. This might cause risk-aversion and result in missed opportunities. National strategies for AI in government, which are now common, are often limited to high-level principles and priorities of action, lacking operational considerations (OECD, 2025^[11]). Furthermore, as citizen participation processes are often implemented at the local level, it is crucial to develop actionable guidance that is relevant for multiple levels of governance while ensuring coordination and effective resource allocation.

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4

What can governments do?

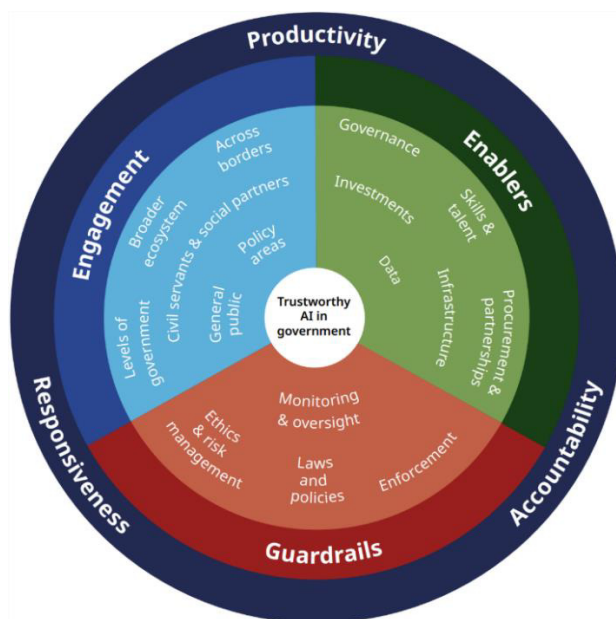
The road to fit-for-purpose AI tools for citizen participation

This chapter builds on the OECD Framework for Trustworthy AI in Government to provide recommendations for a safe and responsible adoption of AI tools in citizen participation processes. It also elaborates on how governments can leverage citizen participation methods to involve citizens in the development, evaluation, and governance of AI systems.

Addressing risks and challenges to take advantage of AI opportunities for citizen participation

AI tools offer significant opportunities to support policymakers and practitioners in designing and implementing meaningful citizen participation processes. Government should seize these opportunities while acting to mitigate the numerous risks entailed by the adoption of AI. In parallel, governments continue working to improve and embed meaningful citizen participation practices in policymaking, beyond the use of digital technologies. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the mitigation strategies to ensure trustworthy uptake of AI tools for participation. These strategies fall under the broader scope of the OECD Framework for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence in Government (OECD, 2025^[11]) which recommends governments to adopt robust Guardrails to counter risks, strengthen Enablers to facilitate use and overcome implementation challenges, and promote Engagement of citizens and stakeholders in shaping and regulating fit-for-purpose AI systems. In addition, the OECD GovTech Policy Framework, as well as the Bertelsmann Stiftung's Public AI Whitepaper present comprehensive integrated approaches for governments to respectively succeed in their digital transformation and steer safe AI ecosystems that build on digital public infrastructure, including in collaboration with non-governmental entities (OECD, 2024^[215]; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2025^[21]; OECD, 2024^[216]).

Figure 4.1. OECD Framework for Trustworthy AI in Government



Source: (OECD, 2025^[11]).

Guardrails: Selecting and creating appropriate and transparent AI tools for meaningful participation in a protected civic space

To prevent adverse outcomes, governments should be cautious in the choice of AI tools they seek to adopt, making sure that the underlying models comply with the OECD AI Principles, including principles of respect for the rule of law, human rights, and democratic values, including fairness and privacy (OECD, 2024^[217]).

For instance, governments can act to close data divides. To address the language divide, the government of Iceland partnered with OpenAI to train the Large Language Model (LLM) GPT-4 in Icelandic in order to preserve the Icelandic language (Government of Iceland, 2023^[218]). Similarly, the University of Turku

(Finland) partnered in 2023 with the company SiloAI to build the Poro model, a family of multilingual open-source LLMs for all European official languages. Poro runs on LUMI, one of the nine supercomputers of the EU High Performance Computing Joint Undertaking (University of Turku, 2023^[219]).

Governments can also act to address privacy concerns by establishing clear frameworks, guidelines, and mechanisms to promote strong data governance that safeguards privacy, intellectual property, and security. Countries like Korea, New Zealand, and the UK have developed dedicated guidance for safe and privacy-preserving use of AI in government, personal information processing and AI development, while France established a data sandbox to create space for safe experimentation (OECD, 2025^[11]).

The OECD AI Principles ascribed transparency and explainability to the core principles of AI systems' development and governance (OECD, 2024^[217]). To promote transparency and auditability of AI, the government of the Netherlands launched in 2022 an Algorithm Register to provide information about the algorithms used by the Dutch Government and guidance to object an algorithm-based decision (Government of the Netherlands, 2022^[220]).

To improve the transparency of digital tools designed and used for citizen participation processes, the civic tech ecosystem adopted and advocated for open-source software, meaning “software the users have the freedom to run, copy, distribute, study, change and improve” (OECD, forthcoming^[221]; The Open Source Initiative, 2023^[222]). According to People Powered's 2025 rating of digital platforms for citizen participation, 10 out of the 10 best ranked platforms are open source (People Powered, 2025^[134]). The open-source paradigm is more complex to apply to AI systems, as it involves multiple layers underpinning the technology: source code, documentation, training data or pre-trained model weights¹. Depending on the system, the label of open-source AI might then be misleading (OECD, 2025^[223]). Alternative paradigms of transparency of AI systems include open standards, i.e., technical specifications or protocols that are developed through transparent processes and are publicly available for anyone to use, implement, or improve (Almeida, Oliveira and Cruz, 2011^[224]; Zielke, 2020^[225]; Mourne, O'Reilly and Strauss, 2025^[226]), and, in the case of foundation models, open weights, i.e. publicly available trained weights (OECD, 2025^[223]).

Moreover, the use of AI tools for citizen participation should be directed towards enhancing governments' capacity to listen to all citizens. To prevent the exclusion of citizens with inadequate skills or limited access digital and AI tools, governments should provide alternative in-person or low-tech formats of participation (OECD, 2022^[3]). The efficiency gains allowed AI tools should serve to improve resource allocation towards these alternative formats. Governments should also invest to strengthen citizens' AI literacy. In April 2025, the US issued an executive order mandating a task force to elaborate an action plan to foster AI education among youth (The White House, 2025^[227]).

Governments should also be open about their use of AI tools as part of citizen participation processes, to ensure process transparency, and establish clear redressal mechanisms to address citizens' grievances. Furthermore, to prevent public resistance and strengthen public trust, governments should be careful in their use of AI tools in all policy functions, and particularly those where misuses of AI could undermine the civic space. Regulations, ethical frameworks, and dedicated strategies can align practices with the respect of civil freedoms.

Enablers: Building capacities to take advantage of AI opportunities in participation

Governments can address the existing gap in awareness and guidance on opportunities and risks of AI in citizen participation. The typology presented in this report, together with the OECD Policy Paper “Tackling Civic Participation Challenges with Emerging Technologies: Beyond the Hype” (OECD, 2025^[17]) can constitute useful resources for governments seeking such guidance.

Awareness initiatives and training opportunities for civil servants are key to preventing these risks and allow governments to unlock the full potential of AI tools to enhance citizen participation and strengthen public trust. For instance, the European Union developed a comprehensive competency framework for AI in government (Medaglia, Mikalef and Tangi, 24^[228]), comprising three dimensions (technology, managerial, and policy, legal and ethical) and three cross-cutting clusters (attitudinal competences, operational competences, and literacy competences).

Beyond guidelines and best practices, governments can map and strengthen innovation ecosystems at the intersection of AI development and citizen participation (OECD, 2025^[229]), and build intergovernmental, international, and multi-stakeholder co-creation platforms, innovation labs, and communities of practice (OECD, 2024^[215]). In addition to the OECD Innovative Citizen Participation Network, the OECD is currently building a Community of Practice on Emerging Technologies for Civic Participation. Similarly, the Bertelsmann Stiftung is co-founder of the Network on Citizen Participation and Deliberation in Europe.

Beyond experimentations and pilots, governments should pursue coordinated approaches that enable the adoption of AI tools at scale and their dedicated use for citizen participation. For example, Sitra’s (Finland) pilots with the platform Polis are part of a broader strategy to equip government at the national and local levels with tools and skills to better interact with citizens (Lovio, 2025^[136]). In the United Kingdom, the iAI Incubator is creating a suite of open-source AI tools for all levels and branches of the British public administrations, including Consult (see Box 2.8) (AI.GOV.UK, 2025^[230]).

Finally, governments can strengthen their capacity to procure AI solutions to foster innovation that is fit-for-purpose (Monteiro, Hlacs and Boéchat, 2024^[231]). Procurement processes of AI tools should carefully consider the consequences of potential vendor and data lock-ins and opt for systems that guarantee interoperability (OECD, 2024^[215]).

Table 4.1. Instilling guardrails and enablers to promote trustworthy AI in participation

Risks and challenges	Description	Potential guardrails & enablers
Ethical risks	Skewed data in AI systems	Invest in high quality data and AI audits Perform assessment risks throughout the lifecycle Map existing practices and publish registries of automated systems
	Undermining civic space and information space	Establish guardrails, implement regulations, and adopt ethical frameworks on the use of artificial intelligence in society
	Lack of transparency and explainability	Promote openness through providing information about how AI systems work and are used in government, and when appropriate, consider open sourcing code for government-developed systems Invest in digital public infrastructure, fostering interoperability of tools and systems
	Affected quality and depth of deliberation	Choose carefully AI tools to enforce equality and fairness
Operational risks	Overreliance on AI systems	Offer training opportunities beyond the technical and operational level to promote a critical approach to the use of AI tools in the public sector

	Privacy and data governance tensions	Provide adequate guidance and mechanisms for privacy-preserving processing of personal data through AI systems Develop robust data governance arrangements
Exclusion risks	Language divides	Close the data divide for low-resource languages
	Exclusion of citizens with limited access or literacy to digital tools	Complement digital participation processes with low or no-tech components Proactively involve distant and underheard groups.
	Use of AI to make predictions instead of consulting citizens	Adopt AI for participation with the objective of providing citizens with more and better opportunities to participate, and not as a form of replacement
Public Resistance risks	Mistrust in the use of AI tools for participation	Provide accessible information on the use of AI tools for citizen participation processes, including public communications on how government use of AI can improve outcomes for citizens Establish strong accountability and redressal's mechanisms
		Adopt AI tools as subsidiary and complementary of human activities
Risks of inaction	Governments' reluctance from adopting AI tools for participation	Raise awareness about the opportunities of AI to improve citizen participation and provide adequate access to learning opportunities
Implementation challenges	Many pilots, little scaling	Define clear strategies allowing coherence and coordination within and across levels of governance, promote impact measurement to justify scale-up of success Leverage innovation labs with controlled learning and pre-established scale-up processes
	Limited actionable guidance	Develop actionable guidance on how to use AI systems in a trustworthy way, focusing not only on prohibitions and limitations, but also on recommended practices Join or start communities of practices reuniting AI, civic tech, and democratic innovations communities
	Inadequate skills	Establish competency frameworks and provide civil servants with formal and informal learning opportunities on the responsible use of AI for citizen participation Identify best practices and organise peer exchanges
	Vendor and data lock-ins	Invest in alignment with strategic goals and ethical frameworks Adopt agile procurement environments to harness the evolving opportunities of AI Avoid lock-ins and procure wisely to ensure interoperability, opt-out, and data ownership Aim at re-use across government agencies

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Citizens as partners in shaping the development, use and regulation of AI-systems

AI systems have the potential to radically reshape the interaction between citizens themselves, and between citizens and their governments. There are several benefits in involving citizens in the design and development of AI-based technologies used by governments: greater trust and legitimacy of AI systems and stronger reflection of the needs of users (OECD, 2024^[232]). Consistently with the provisions of the Engagement pillar of the OECD Framework on Trustworthy AI in Government, citizens and stakeholders can be involved at different stages of the technology cycle (OECD, 2025^[11]). For example, in 2023, the United Kingdom engaged in a series of public consultations with more than 300 stakeholders to build a regulatory framework for AI to drive safe, responsible innovation (United Kingdom Government, 2024^[233]). Similarly, in 2024 the government of Brazil involved more than 300 citizens and stakeholders to shape its AI plan (Government of Brazil, 2024^[234]).

Defining principles and priorities with citizens: Citizen assemblies on trustworthy AI

Citizens can contribute to the definition of priorities and principles guiding the development and governance of AI in government and in society. Representative deliberative processes, which are meant to address the type of policy issues that have long-term implications and carry society-wide value-based dilemmas, requiring trade-offs, are particularly well suited to dealing with AI policy and governance decisions (OECD, 2020^[93]; Hintz, 2021^[235]). AI involves ethical and societal discussions to decide on its uses in specific contexts (e.g. facial recognition, online harm). Most importantly, the adoption of AI technologies can shape social interactions in the long term, with impacts that can span several generations. In 2024, the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union launched a Citizen Panel gathered a representative group of 60 Belgians to collect their views on artificial intelligence and the role of the EU in developing and regulating it (Belgian Presidency, 2024^[76]). Similarly, in late 2024 the Citizens' Jury "AI and Freedom" of the German state of Baden-Württemberg formulated nine recommendations on how citizens can be involved in the publicly funded research and development of AI. The members of the mini-public presented their findings to Science Minister Petra Olschowski on 10 March 2025. Citizen assemblies on AI could be relevant and impactful at all levels of governance, from local (Verhulst and Chwalisz, 2025^[236]) to global (Davies et al., 2024^[237]).

Co-designing and co-creating AI systems

Governments can harness citizen and stakeholder expertise to shape AI tools and models that meet societal needs through citizen participation processes such as open innovation and co-creation. For example, in 2020 the French Government launched PIAF, a collaborative initiative with citizens, academia and civil society to build databases in French language to train AI models. In 2023, the tech company Anthropic, which developed the AI-model Claude, partnered with the Collective Intelligence Project to involve a representative sample of ~1000 American citizens in the collaborative drafting of a constitution for an AI system using Polis (Ganguli and al., 2023^[238]). In 2024, the government of India organised an open online hackathon on data-driven innovation to address citizens grievances. The five problem statements revolved around the development of AI-driven systems to cluster and label citizen grievances, create virtual assistants for both citizens and civil servants, and improve the accuracy of speech-to-text transcriptions of feedback calls in Hindi and English (Innovate India, 2024^[239]). Between 2023 and 2025, Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands worked together to co-create AI systems that could address real-life challenges of citizen participation (see Box 4.1).

Box 4.1. Improving civic participation with emerging technologies in the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain

Between 2023 and 2025, the OECD supported the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain in defining and addressing citizen participation challenges using emerging technology. The project “Improving civic participation with emerging technologies”, funded by the European Commission through the Technical Support Instrument, consisted in three main phases: (1) surfacing and fine tuning of citizen participation challenges by challenge owners within the public administrations of the three countries; (2) co-creation of prototypes leveraging emerging technologies, designed during a co-creation bootcamp held in February 2025 in Lisbon with 90+ participants from government, academia, private sector and civil society; (3) roll-out and scaling at the national and EU level. The three prototypes, ConsultationAI (the Netherlands), OnRecord (Portugal) and ParticipApp (Spain) use AI systems to improve citizens’ experience when taking part in participatory processes while expanding governments’ capacity to listen and analyse citizens’ needs and contributions. The prototypes are currently being tested and refined before being deployed – and, in the case of Portugal, embedded in the national platform for participation Participa.gov.

Source: (LabX - ARTE, 2025^[240]).

Assessing and challenging AI

Citizens and stakeholders have a fundamental role to play in the oversight of AI tools. For instance, in the United States, the Expert & Citizen Assessment of Science & Technology (ECAST) Participatory Technology Assessment is bringing public perspectives to discuss critical government science and technology decisions (Weller, Farooque and Sullivan Govani, 2021^[241]). Citizens, researchers, and civil society organisations are also challenging AI models by applying Red Teaming techniques, which use adversarial methods to identify vulnerabilities in systems (UNESCO, 2025^[242]; Singh et al., 2025^[243]).

Shaping AI governance

International AI governance could benefit from broader input, including that of citizens and stakeholders. Lessons can be drawn by the precedent of the world wide web. The architecture of global governance for the Internet is based on a multi-stakeholder process where public authorities and non-governmental actors have an equal voice (see Box 4.2). Although this model does not come without limitations, including power imbalances and lack of binding authority, the establishment of multi-stakeholder fora where citizens are represented can ensure multiple voices are heard and can influence how technologies are shaped. In Brazil, national institution, academia, private sector provider, and third sector advocates converge in the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee to establishing strategic guidelines related to the use and development of the Internet in Brazil, such as the allocation of IP Addresses and the administration of the Domain (CGI.br, 2025^[244]).

Box 4.2. Internet participatory governance

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) is a global multi-stakeholder organization responsible for coordinating the Internet's Domain Name System (DNS), ensuring its stable and secure operation. The governance of ICANN follows a bottom-up, consensus-driven, and multi-stakeholder approach. The stakeholders included in its discussions include governments, private sector, civil society, and technical experts. Its policy development process is managed through various supporting organizations and advisory committees, which collaborate to create policies related to the Internet's naming, addressing, and protocol parameter systems. Consensus is reached through Bylaws, processes, and international meetings.

Source: (ICANN, 2024^[245]).

The OECD's Global Partnership for Artificial Intelligence (GPAI), comprising 44 member countries, involves a multidisciplinary community of more than 500 AI experts from government, industry, academia, and civil society. The latter is represented through the Civil Society Information Society Advisory Council (CSISAC) (OECD.AI, 2025^[246]; CSISAC, 2025^[247]).

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Notes

¹ Model weights are the variables or numerical values used to specify how the input (e.g. text describing an image) is transformed into the output (e.g., the image itself). These are iteratively updated during model training to improve the model’s performance on the tasks for which it is trained” (Seger et al., 2023^[299]).

5 Conclusions

Governments are using AI tools to improve citizen participation processes

Across OECD member and partner countries, evidence shows that citizen participation is emerging as a prominent area of experimentation in the use of AI in government. The analysis of 50 case studies described in this report confirm that AI tools open significant opportunities to improve and enhance citizen participation processes. For instance, AI-powered sense-making, information development, translation, transcription, virtual assistance, facilitation, simulation, and architecture tools can create new bridges, and empower citizens in navigating complexity in policy making, while expanding government capacity to take citizen voices into account when making decisions. Various applications can concur in supporting the activities of practitioners and policymakers to address some of the challenges of participation, while supporting citizens in playing their part. All in all, AI tools can improve the design and the accessibility of citizen participation processes, enable participation at scale while maintaining the quality, and allow for a better allocation of government resources. The Typology proposed in this report is meant to support policymakers and practitioners in navigating the opportunities offered by AI in this field.

Among the different applications analysed, AI-powered sense-making, virtual assistance and translation tools are currently the most widespread, often integrated in existing digital tools and platforms for participation. Some citizen participation processes, such as public consultations and representative deliberative processes, are areas of particular interest with respect to the opportunities offered by AI tools. The adoption of AI tools for participation is for the time being mostly driven by local-level initiatives, showcasing the role of local governments in pushing the boundaries of democratic innovations. However, some countries are leveraging their national innovation labs and international ecosystems to develop and adopt AI tools to support participation at the national level.

Beyond task-specific tools, technological progress is creating room for further experimentation in AI-human policymaking. Beyond citizen participation processes, evidence shows that AI tools can support all areas of open government, including transparency and access to information, the protection of civic space, government accountability, and government communication.

Governments can act to steer the trustworthy adoption of AI while continuing to improve citizen participation

Most initiatives analysed adopted process-specific tools and implemented processes on an *ad hoc* basis. While these cases highlight the potential for AI to enhance citizen participation, they also underscore the need for governments to engage with this trend strategically.

AI systems entail significant risks on multiple levels: (1) ethical risks resulting in adverse outcomes, threats to the civic space and surveillance, lack of transparency and explainability, and affected quality and depth of dialogue and deliberation; (2) operational risks entailing overreliance on AI systems and privacy concerns, (3) exclusion risks that might create new barriers to participation for some segments of the population, (4) public resistance risks related to citizens' mistrust in the use of AI for participation, (5) risk

of inaction and missed opportunity of not adopting AI when relevant. Governments are also confronted with implementation challenges when adopting AI tools for participation: (1) limited skills among civil servants, (2) limited actionable guidance, (3) difficulties in scaling pilot experiences, and (4) market concentrations of AI tools and lock-ins once tools have been procured. Governments should act to address these risks and overcome these challenges by creating the conditions to design and select fair and transparent AI tools and build capacity and steer ecosystems to seize the opportunities offered by this technology, while preserving the quality of citizen participation processes and protecting civic space.

Furthermore, AI and technology alone cannot solve all challenges of citizen participation. Governments should continue working to improve the quality and the accessibility of citizen participation processes while establishing mechanisms to ensure that citizens' efforts have a clear impact on policy and decision-making. AI and other digital and emerging technologies should be seen as supporting tools to further improve and enhance meaningful and impactful citizen participation.

Finally, the intersection between citizen participation and AI should be seen as a two-way street: on one hand, AI tools can support and enhance citizen participation processes. On the other hand, governments can leverage citizen participation practices to involve citizens in the design, deployment and monitoring of AI systems.

Looking ahead, governments should move beyond short-term experiments and task-specific applications to consider more fundamentally how democratic institutions and participation processes should evolve in an AI-enhanced context, particularly as technologies rapidly progress towards more advanced general-purpose capabilities.

Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Citizen Participation

Typology of Applications, Opportunities and Challenges for Democratic Innovation

This report explores the opportunities and challenges of the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) tools to improve citizen participation. To do so, it builds on desk research and analysis of 50 AI use cases in citizen participation processes from 22 OECD Member and partner countries.

It proposes a typology of applications to help government officials and practitioners navigate the landscape of AI tools for participation based on their needs and the challenges they face. The report also provides insights on emerging trends in the adoption of AI tools for participation, analyses the related risks, and outlines relevant mitigation strategies that allow governments to steer the trustworthy adoption of the technology.

