

# Artificial intelligence can strengthen citizen participation

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*The Bertelsmann Stiftung's new Policy Brief uses 50 case studies from 22 countries to illustrate how AI can support citizen participation and to identify the risks that must be considered. The study was conducted in collaboration with the OECD.*

**Gütersloh, 26.08.2026.** Artificial intelligence (AI) offers enormous potential to better deliver on the key promises of political citizen participation: broader inclusion, genuine openness, user-friendly processes and scalable processes. Governments and civil society actors around the world are already using AI for this purpose: from analysing large volumes of citizen input to supporting participation processes through chatbots, moderation systems and AI-assisted moderation.

This is demonstrated in the new Policy Brief "Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Citizen Participation," which is based on a joint paper by the OECD and the Bertelsmann Stiftung and examines 50 specific cases of the application of AI from 22 countries.

Overall, the findings show that AI can make citizen participation more accessible, scalable and effective. However, its true value very much depends on how it is used. AI can only strengthen participation if it improves governments' ability to listen to citizens without replacing democratic judgement, transparency and trust.

## Nine types of AI applications

The study identifies nine different areas where AI can be applied in citizen participation: sense-making, information development, translation, transcription, virtual assistance, facilitation, moderation, simulation and participation architecture. Sense-making, virtual assistance and automated translation are particularly widespread at present.

Sense-making applications can analyse large volumes of ideas and comments, identify patterns and summarize contributions. Translation and transcription tools can reduce barriers to access. Virtual assistants, such as chatbots, help citizens access information and participation opportunities more easily.

Relevant examples demonstrate how this works in practice, such as the one in Cambridge in the United Kingdom, where an AI tool in 2024 supported the analysis of qualitative contributions from a public consultation and reduced the time needed by about 50 percent. In Finland in 2024, the Finnish innovation agency Sitra used the Alpowered platform Polis to enable over 18,000 people to participate in the public consultation "What do you think, Finland?"

## Opportunities and Risks

In addition to the considerable opportunities, the use of AI also carries risks. Biased data can influence results, and a lack of transparency can undermine trust and legitimacy. In addition, there is a risk of new forms of digital exclusion. Other challenges include a lack of AI expertise in public institutions and dependence on proprietary systems – that is, closed technologies whose source code, interfaces or formats are under the sole control of a manufacturer.

To ensure that AI supports civic participation in a responsible and inclusive manner, the Policy Brief offers recommendations in three areas: guardrails, enablers and public engagement. Governments should establish clear guardrails, build capacity for the responsible use of AI and involve citizens in the design and oversight of these systems.

Ultimately, AI is, of course, no substitute for democratic participation. However, when used responsibly, it can help make participation more accessible, scalable and responsive.

## About the publication

The Policy Brief is a condensed version of the OECD paper "Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Citizen Participation: Typology of applications, opportunities and challenges for democratic innovations," based on a collaboration between the OECD and the Bertelsmann Stiftung.

Download link for the study:

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