# AI and Democracy: The Coming Civilization

## Foreword

On September 28, 2023, on the eve of the second round of the Slovak parliamentary elections, several videos appeared on social networks, allegedly showing candidate Michal Simecka discussing ways to rig the results with journalist Monika Todova. These were *deepfakes*, videos generated using artificial intelligence. Since then, similar phenomena have occurred in other elections.

In December 2024, Calin Georgescu, a far-right, pro-Russian candidate who was unknown a month before declaring his candidacy, came out on top in the first round of the Romanian presidential election after a campaign based on social networks, in particular TikTok. Between the two rounds, the Constitutional Court invalidated the results due to suspicion of Russian influence on social networks. Some interpreted this decision, based on constitutional law, as a denial of democracy, interpreting the dynamics on social networks as a fully-fledged legitimate element of contemporary democratic models.

These examples illustrate the unprecedented upheavals caused by the digital revolution in our democracies, against a backdrop of increasing polarization in our societies and the explosion of anti-system votes. Added to this are new political and geopolitical dynamics, marked by an increasingly close relationship between the digital power of certain tech giants and political power, such as the Musk/Trump pairing, which directly challenges the sovereignty of representative democracies. The question of the link between democracy and Artificial Intelligence (AI) is emerging as the major issue of the century.

AI is radically transforming society, its representations, and its modes of governance. It comes on top of major innovations such as writing and printing, which have revolutionized the way humans think and live together. At the dawn of the modern world, the printing press sparked a revolution in freedom of thought and global awareness. In the same way that today's representative democracy emerged from the economic, social and political compromises of the industrial revolution, the digital revolution is challenging our modes of governance and our art of living together in completely new ways

At a time of growing awareness of the democratic risks associated with AI, and in a totally altered global geopolitical context, this note aims to identify coherence within the proliferation of initiatives and players around the world regarding the relationship between democracy and AI (Figure 1).

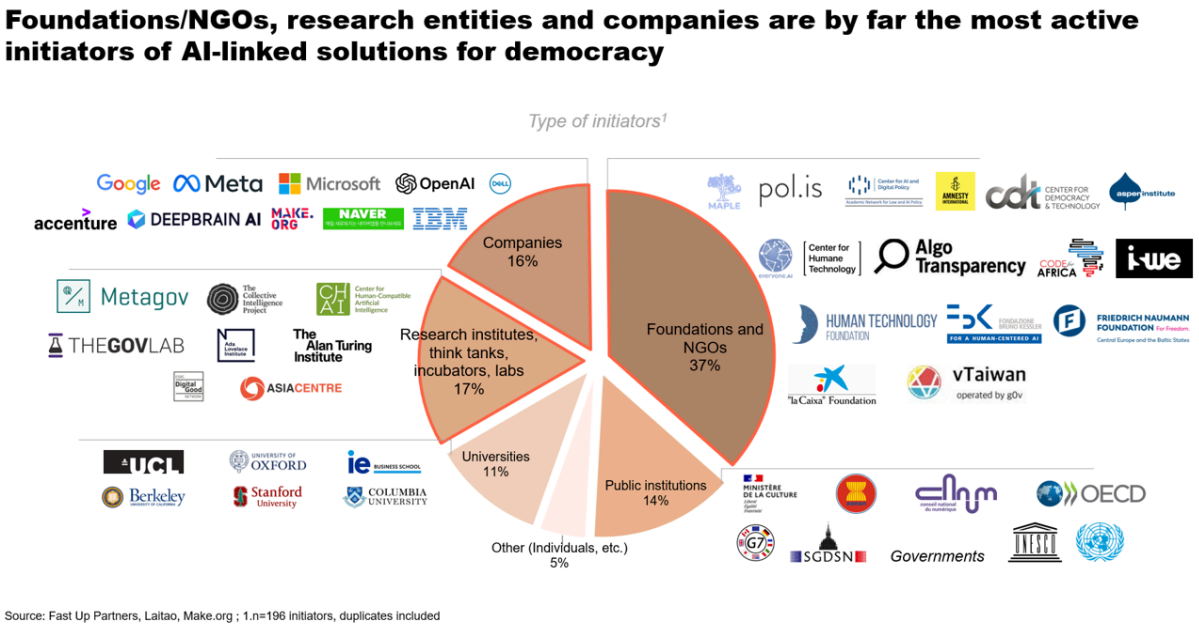


**Figure 1 - The origin of the 100 initiatives**

Three key findings emerge from this mapping:

- **An over-representation of foundations or NGOs (37%)** compared to private actors **(16%)**, public institutions **(14%)** and universities and research laboratories **(28%)**, which obviously raises issues in the context of a public good such as democracy.
- **An over-representation of initiatives of American origin (37%) and highly polarized funding**, which raises issues of sovereignty and Europe's mobilization to put AI at the service of democracy. **65% of the initiatives listed are funded by at least one American private player**, and American meta-platforms are by far the leading sponsor of these initiatives.
- **A governance risk linked to the much greater investment clout of the GAFAMs** (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, Microsoft), which dominate the development and exploitation of AI technologies.

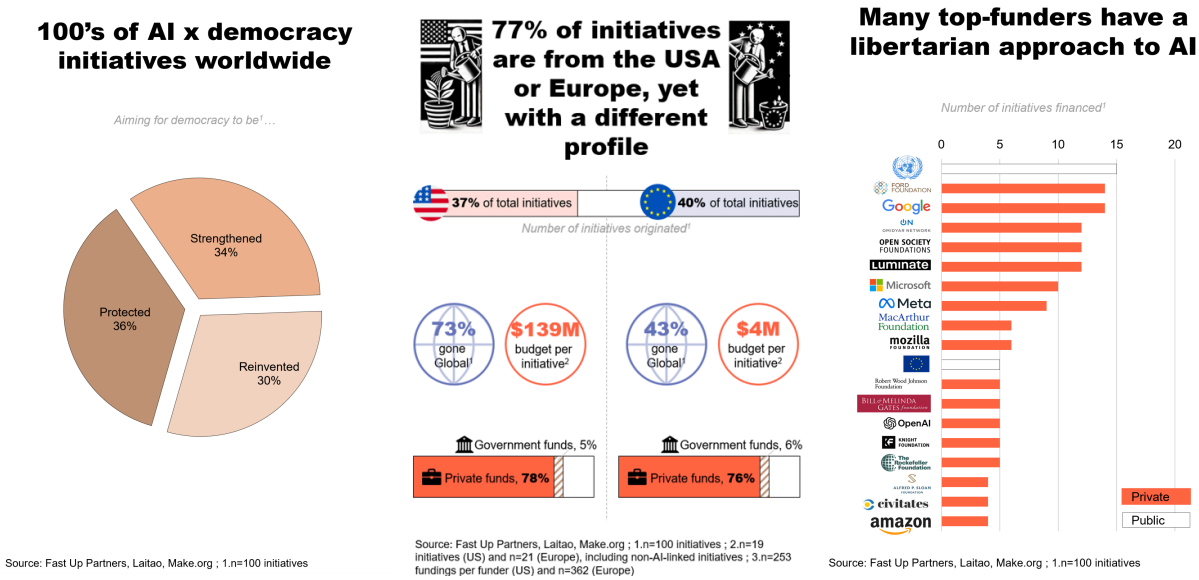


**Figure 2 - Map of the 100 initiatives on AI and democracy**

In this patchwork, three major groups emerge (Figure 2):

- **The first set of initiatives focuses on defending representative democracy, advocating for more regulation.**
- **The second set of initiatives aims to strengthen or reinvent representative democracy thanks to the extraordinary opportunities offered by AI.**
- **A third group, made up of top-funders, has a libertarian vision of governance, based on a liquid democracy where individual freedom and efficiency take precedence over the traditional mechanisms of representative democracy.**

With the help of this cartography, this note discusses the coherence of these three sets, and analyzes the underlying questions that strongly shake up representative democracy and require essential choices:

- **How can we regain control of digital tools and guarantee AI at the service of democracy?**
- **How can we make AI a lever for improvement, rather than a factor in the dehumanization of politics with cold, algorithmic governance?**

# 1. Protecting democracy in the face of AI?

**The first set of initiatives** includes those being developed in Europe, the USA and various countries around the world. These propose to protect representative democracies from the potentially disruptive effects of AI, such as the polarization of debates, the destabilizing effect of *deepfakes*, and the subversion of the sovereignty of democratic states, through appropriate regulations. These initiatives take a more critical view of digital capitalism: obsessed with the efficient management of human relations, capitalism would create an irrational and impulsive Homo numéricus, with disruptive effects on democracy.[1]

## 1.1 AI, polarization and sovereignty

- **The erosion of representative democracies**

For over a decade, the principles of representative democracy have been challenged by a significant surge in anti-system voting in Europe and the United States. While these votes are primarily fuelled by citizens' anger and resentment at the powerlessness of traditional institutions to protect them from the disruptions of capitalism[2], AI, mainly in the form of algorithms integrated in social media, is contributing to the increase of polarization.
In his analysis of populism, Pierre Rosanvallon[3] reminds us that representative democracy is both a mode of government and an art of living together. It is a political system in which citizens elect representatives to govern on their behalf. Unlike direct democracy, where the people decide directly on laws and policies, representative democracy delegates this responsibility to elected representatives, who make decisions within institutions such as parliaments. This intermediary role is essential to the peaceful resolution of economic, political and social conflicts between citizens. The whole history of representative democracy has consisted of a long struggle to sublimate legitimate conflicts between citizens into a programmatic and reasoned field, using institutional intermediaries such as trade unions, parties and elected representatives to find consensus. In this respect, social networks structurally induce a tension, more or less critical, between elected representatives and representative systems, as they inherently call for a "participative" system.

[1] Daniel Cohen, *Homo numericus: La "civilisation" qui vient* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2022).
[2] Yann Algan, Elizabeth Beasley, Daniel Cohen and Marc Foucault, *Les origines du populisme* (Paris: Média Diffusion, 2019).
[3] Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le siècle du populisme. Histoire, théorie, critique* (Paris: Média Diffusion, 2020).

The history of representative democracy is marked by this tension—described by Bernard Manin[4]—as a conflict between "the popular will and the independence of the rulers". As in recent elections in Romania, the United States and Argentina, representatives of anti-system parties are criticizing representative democracy in the name of greater democracy.

The digital society, amplified by AI, may threaten this model of governance and art of living together for several reasons.

- **The role of AI and social networks on political polarization**

While the Internet's role as a factor of transparency, large-scale dissemination of information, and the creation of democratic commons or collaborative communities such as Wikipedia, we must not underestimate the negative inducements that some of its dimensions may entail, particularly where AI and social networks are concerned.

- **Polarization issues**: in some cases, algorithms can contribute to polarization and radicalization. Far from creating a new agora: a place for discussion where ideas are exchanged and circulated, AI-based algorithms are likely to turn opponents into enemies, programs into one-sided, Manichean thinking. The risk is that millions of Internet users will fall victim to a polarization phenomenon of their own making, constantly seeing only publications on very limited themes: delinquency, immigration, or political statements defending the point of view of a single political current. These long-standing phenomena are tending to grow stronger with the development of AI-based social networking applications. As a result, Internet users feel they are embracing the complexity of the world through these applications, even though they only perceive a small part of it.

- **The potential absence of real debate**: In some cases, chat rooms become places where beliefs are asserted rather than debated. Added to this are sometimes "safe space" issues: if Internet users can insult others freely, moderate voices, less inclined to engage in verbal one-upmanship, gradually fade away, as seems to be happening on X at the moment.

- **The role of bots and AIs in manipulating opinion and spreading *deepfakes* on a massive scale**: With algorithms, which are not open source and can be manipulated by technological and political oligarchies, it is possible to subtly influence opinion, without even dealing with visible political criteria, for example by favoring videos of robberies or crimes, music and distressing themes, in an

[4] Bernard Manin, *Principes du gouvernement représentatif* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2012).

attempt to foster a feeling of insecurity. Algorithms can penetrate to the heart of the psyche and emotions of human beings, with consequences for democracies. This is particularly true of AIs such as Deepseek and Character.

- **The capture of democratic debate by platforms and private algorithms**

  Looking at all the top 100 initiatives in Figure 1, the prominence given to private and American players raises some daunting questions:

  - The privatization of public debate: The crucial issue is the potential control of information and the framing of discussions by the major digital platforms.
  - Moderation issues: Who sets the rules? Who controls access to the digital public space?
  - Geopolitical influence: interference by foreign powers through the manipulation of algorithms and information flows. The AI revolution is taking place against a backdrop of geopolitical upheaval, of which it is one of the key players. The debate on the European Constitution in 2005, which was played out by e-mail and blogs, was certainly the first jolt in a political dynamic in which information technologies play a leading role. The Arab Spring in December 2010 confirmed this dynamic. The fact that the power of technology is dominated by the USA and China poses a real threat to the democratic sovereignty of countries, with interference of the same nature as that of Russia during the Romanian elections. Even more fearsome, we would have moved to a transactional geopolitics, where control of technology and AI would make the law of the strongest reign to the detriment of rights in the international arena.

## 1.2 AI and *hypnocracy*

*"Digital platforms are revealing themselves for what they are: not mere communication tools, but hypnotic technologies that actively reshape the way we perceive and interpret reality. In this new dimension, power no longer lies in the control of bodies or minds, but in the ability to modulate the states of consciousness of entire populations.*

*The notion of **hypnocracy**—the power and domination of fantasies—is used to describe this system where power operates directly, i.e. algorithmically, on consciousness, creating permanent altered states through the digital manipulation of attention and perception. Their critique remains trapped in the Enlightenment model of*

*communication, where truth must triumph by its intrinsic merit, without understanding that it is now an aesthetic product, a collective experience generated by the repetition, emotion and suggestion of an algorithmic reality.*"[5]
Jianwei Xun

Another major threat posed by AI to our representative democracies relates directly to the addiction and reflective capacities of citizens. Today, AI algorithms occupy a position comparable to that of the assembly line in the organization of work. It's not just the body, but the human psyche that's being Taylorized.

Drawing on Daniel Kahneman's famous distinction[6] between system 1, the system of emotions and impulses, and system 2, the system of reason, in the functioning of the human brain, AI can gradually replace the efforts of human reflection, and play only on that of emotions. AI algorithms can in fact be programmed to capture emotions, and thus act on broadcast content to elicit immediate reactions, rather than stimulating reasoned and complex reflection. This dynamic is particularly true in the case of social networks, where AI-powered recommendation algorithms are optimized to maximize user engagement and emotional reactions. It is all the more worrying for some users, notably voters for anti-system or populist parties where the majority emotion is anger[7] , which could make any margin for debate or reconciliation unlikely. The most recent research in cognitive and social sciences shows that individuals dominated by anger do not seek compromise, but to turn the tables in a "nothing left to lose" logic, and are impervious to new information contrary to their initial beliefs.[8]

The great strength of populists is their ability to capitalize on this anger by offering a purely emotional spectacle[9]. In this context, the usual moderating mechanisms of representative democracy, in search of truth or rationality, become less effective.

Some studies suggest that the AI used in social networks could have an impact on the body comparable to that of a drug on the same scale as tobacco or cocaine.[10] Teenagers spend almost 40% of their waking life on screens, mainly social networks, unable to distinguish between virtual and real life. In his latest book, "Génération anxieuse" (Anxious Generation), Jonathan Haidt[11]

[5] Jianwei Xun, "Trump, Musk: l'hypnocratie ou l'empire des fantasmes", *Le Grand Continent*, January 26, 2025, https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2025/01/26/trump-musk-lhypnocratie-ou-lempire-des-fantasmes/
[6] Daniel Kahneman and Raymond Clarinard, System 1, system 2: the two speeds of thought (Paris: Flammarion, 2016).
[7] Algan et al, *Les origines du populisme*, chap. 5.
[8] Yann Algan and Thomas Renault, *La France sous nos Tweets-Portrait d'une France en colère, et de ses conséquences politiques*, no. 2409 (Paris: CEPREMAP, 2024).
[9] Yann Algan, Thomas Renault and Hugo Subtil, *La Fièvre parlementaire: ce monde où l'on catche*, no. 2501 (Paris: CEPREMAP, 2025).
[10] Hunt Allcott, Luca Braghieri, Sarah Eichmeyer and Matthew Gentzkow, "The Welfare Effects of Social Media", *American Economic Review* 110, no. 3 (2020): 629-676.
[11] Jonathan Haidt, *Génération anxieuse* (Paris: Les Arènes, 2024).

shows how AI and networks threaten the brains and equilibrium of young people: fragmentation of attention, addiction to screens, lower self-esteem, lack of sleep, disappearance of real social interactions. More generally, numerous studies are warning of the potential damage of AI to people's ability to think and pay attention, leading to "La Fabrique du Crétin digital"[12] .

AI and the digital society reinforce citizens' sense of solitude. Post-industrial society marks the transition from a society of classes to a society of isolated individuals, whether at work, in the territories, but also on social networks. From the Gilets Jaunes to the unprecedented drop in life expectancy in the United States studied by Case and Deaton[13] , social solitude is the deepest evil of all, the very cause of suicide according to Durkheim the father of French sociology.

## 1.3 Initiatives to defend representative democracy

In the face of these perils, our mapping reveals the wealth of initiatives that seek to combat the perverse effects of AI on representative democracies. This first group of initiatives does not aim to upset the established order, but rather to ensure that various principles are upheld.

The most emblematic actions are the following, also illustrated by three examples in Figure 3.

- Transparency and democratic control of algorithms: user choice of algorithm, open-source obligation for algorithms influencing public opinion, and investigation of opaque algorithms (e.g. **AI Forensics, AI and Democracy Innovation Lab**).
- Research into the most effective moderation mechanisms, conducted in particular by universities researching the impact of fact-checking and community notes (e.g. **Full Fact AI, Algorithm Watch**).
- Develop interference detection mechanisms (e.g. **Viginum**).
- Framing the use of AI in public decision-making and elections (e.g. **AI for Electoral Actors**).
- Help secure the IT systems of opinion leaders and whistleblowers (cyber rather than AI). (e.g. **Center for Informed Democracy & Social - cybersecurity (IDeaS)).**

[12] Michel Desmurget, *La fabrique du crétin digital: Les dangers des écrans pour nos enfants* (Paris: Média Diffusion, 2019).
[13] Anne Case and Angus Deaton, *Deaths of Despair and the Future of Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

**Initiatives that aim to protect the current processes of representative democracy can actively contribute in various ways, such as...**

| ...Implementing electoral integrity | | ...Combating misinformation and its spread online | | ...Addressing AI's advancements and its societal impacts | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Type**: NGO Project<br>**Initiators**: International IDEA (NGO)<br>**Objective**: Equipping electoral management bodies, civil society, and the media with greater awareness and understanding of AI's role in elections<br>**Offer**: Workshops and training sessions | | **Type**: AI-based technology<br>**Initiators**: Full Fact (NGO)<br>**Objective**: Protecting democracy from the spread of false information online<br>**Offer**: AI algorithms and human fact-checkers to identify false information in real-time | | **Type**: Tools & reports<br>**Initiators**: AI Forensics (NGO)<br>**Objective**: Highlighting the disparate and obscure impacts of algorithms on popular social media<br>**Offer**: Reports based on investigations into AI systems' potential democratic risks | |
| **Origin**: Sweden | **Scope**: Worldwide | **Origin**: UK | **Scope**: UK-centric | **Origin**: France | **Scope**:Worldwide |
| **Public Financing**:<br>None | **Private Financing**:<br>Social Resilience Fund (Open AI & Microsoft) (US - $2M) | **Public Financing**:<br>European Media and Information Fund (EU), Interest (Unspecified) | **Private Financing**:<br>Google.org Charitable Giving Fund (US), Meta (US), Mohn Westlake Foundation (UK), Luminate (US), and more | **Public Financing**:<br>None | **Private Financing**:<br>Foundation Limelight (the Netherlands), Open Society Foundations (US), Mozilla (US) |
| **Budget:** €2M (including non-AI-linked initiatives) | | **Budget:** £2.6M (including non-AI-linked initiatives) | | **Budget:** $500k (total spending in 2023) | |
| **Link:** https://www.idea.int/project/ai-electoral-actors | | **Link:** https://fullfact.org/ | | **Link:** https://aiforensics.org/ | |

**Figure 3 - Emblematic initiatives to protect representative democracy**

# 2. AI as a lever to strengthen and reinvent democratic governance?

**The second set of initiatives** works more to use AI as a promise to strengthen and reinvent democratic governance. From this perspective, AI is seen above all as a tremendous opportunity to respond to citizens' anger and dissatisfaction with representative democracy through, for example, democratic commons or platform states, and greater efficiency of decision-making processes in institutions. This group mainly comprises players from civil society, universities and foundations.

## 2.1 Should public decisions be made by AIs?

AI is already widely integrated into certain public action processes, sometimes in a totally automated way. Take the example of speeding tickets: an automatic radar captures the image of the offending vehicle, artificial intelligence analyzes the license plate, eliminates false positives and then automatically generates and dispatches the fine. This process illustrates how AI optimizes administrative efficiency while reducing human intervention.

If only because they are capable of performing tasks incomparably faster than humans, and because modern states struggle to fulfill the missions that citizens expect of them, algorithms are set to invade all the transactional devices (commerce, social and public services) that structure a

sophisticated society. What's more, the emergence of low-cost, open-source AI programs may offer states an opportunity to greatly improve the provision of public services.

Whether it's the selection of pupils and students (Parcoursup) at different stages of their learning path, the creation and implementation of personalized vocational training tools, the allocation of social aid, the calculation of taxes and their explicability, algorithms have an important role, and this importance continues to grow with the development of AI[14]

Numerous judicial experiments using AI on a more or less large scale are already underway. Algorithm-based judging processes can sometimes prove more effective if they are insensitive to external factors. As Kahneman points out[15] , judges, on the other hand, are not impervious to contexts and elements totally unrelated to the case being judged. Their mood can alter their decisions: they make harsher rulings on the Monday following a defeat for their team, they are also more lenient on the defendant's birthday, or are very sensitive to the outside temperature, judgments being harsher on hot days. Doctors are also victims of these errors of judgment: a greater propensity to prescribe opiates at the end of the day when they themselves are tired... AI also seems more appropriate for parole, as demonstrated by Sendhil Mullainathan[16] , from MIT. By avoiding the most common biases of judges, he has developed an AI resulting in a 40% reduction in incarceration rates in situations equivalent to human judgments, and without any change in recidivism rates.

Figure 4 illustrates some emblematic initiatives in this field of strengthening representative democracy through democratic commons or platform states.

[14] Issues apparently peripheral to democracy could, in light of AI, be strongly linked to it, such as increased mobility—with autonomous vehicles— which is a significant factor, as numerous studies indicate that geographical mobility is closely correlated with social mobility and civic engagement ("Les politiques publiques en faveur de la mobilité sociale des jeunes", France Stratégie, October 2023). Or, in another field, that of mental health: do AIs risk exacerbing the deterioration of mental health, or could they, on the contrary, contribute to its improvement or the treatment of associated pathologies?

[15] Daniel Kahneman, *Noise: A Flaw in Human Judgment* (New York: HarperCollins, 2021).

[16] Sendhil Mullainathan, "Discrimination by Algorithm and People", keynote speech presented at the *Legal Challenges of the Data Economy* conference, March 22, 2019

**Initiatives that focus on strengthening the current processes of representative democracy can play a significant role through diverse means, like...**

| ...Leveraging AI to empower certain populations | | ...Leveraging civic engagement | | ...Leveraging ethical AI tools for a democratic cause | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| WADHWANI AI | | AI and Democracy DEMOCRATIC COMMONS | | AMNESTY TECH | |
| **Type**: Research Institute<br>**Initiators**: Dr Romesh Wadhwani (Individual Initiator)<br>**Objective**: Empowering developing countries with AI solutions for social impact<br>**Offer**: Creating AI-powered tools for agriculture, healthcare, and education | | **Type**: Research consortium<br>**Initiators**: Make.org (Company), SciencesPo and CNRS-Sorbonne (Universities)<br>**Objective**: Revolutionizing citizen engagement by simplifying access to information with LLM<br>**Offer**: Research on the biases of generative AI | | **Type**: NGO<br>**Initiators**: Amnesty Tech<br>**Objective**: Advocating for human rights-centered regulation of AI<br>**Offer**: Article & on-site actions: Examining whether Big Tech is properly regulated to protect human rights | |
| **Origin**: India | **Scope**: India | **Origin**: France | **Scope**: France | **Origin**: US | **Scope**:Worldwide |
| **Public Financing**: USAID (US), Karnataka State Department of Agriculture (India) | **Private Financing**: Wadhwani brothers (India), Google.org (US), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundations (US), Meta (US) | **Public Financing**: CNRS-Sorbonne (France), BPI (France), France 2030 (France) | **Private Financing**: Make.org (France) ; SciencesPo (France) | **Public Financing**: None | **Private Financing**: Access Now (US), Front Line Defenders (Ireland), Human Rights Watch (US), InterSecLab (Brazil), SocialTic (Mexico), and more |
| **Budget:** $30M (initial philanthropic investment) | | **Budget:** $6M (from the BPI) | | **Budget:** $350M[1] (including non-AI-linked initiatives) | |
| Link: https://www.wadhwaniai.org/ | | Link: https://about.make.org/democratic-commons/landing-page | | Link: https://www.amnesty.org/en/tech/ | |

**Figure 4 - Emblematic initiatives that strengthen representative democracy**

## 2.2 Is it better to be judged by a human or an algorithm?

While AI has enormous potential in these regal domains, research is nevertheless revealing a general feeling of a dehumanization of public action induced by digital technologies[17] . Ben Green, researcher at the Berkman Center[18] observes that, while AI and algorithms are potentially very effective, they completely remove the emotional transaction that is one of the constitutive elements of *pólis*: the judge who admonishes the offender, the public official who explains the intention of the law behind the administrative act.

So, while OpenFisca for French taxes is not widely contested, this is less the case for Parcoursup, which is considered essentially discriminatory by those who didn't get the assignment they wanted, and even less the case for the CAF's welfare algorithm, which, unlike the previous two, has not been published and whose arbitrations have immediate consequences for those claiming benefits. As for the automated radar process, it is widely criticized for a number of reasons . [19]

[17] An analysis of these same complaints shows that the word "digital" is the fourth most frequent and is very strongly associated with negative terms.

[18] Ben Green, *The Smart Enough City: Putting Technology in Its Place to Reclaim Our Urban Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019). In this book, Green analyzes how the use of technology, including algorithms, in urban governance can affect citizen participation and civic-mindedness.

[19] An analysis of the grievances expressed in 2020 on the *Grand Débat* website, which was then organized by the Elysée Palace with the support of the Government Information Service, shows that criticism primarily focuses on the restriction of freedom of movement, followed by automation, which is deemed unfair due to its lack of recourse and dehumanized nature.

We're a long way from the intention of the founding fathers of microcomputing and the Internet , which was to increase citizen involvement by enabling everyone to express their views on the full range of public policy issues, and to strengthen the participatory aspect of democratic processes. One incriminating thought is that, even among those working to defend democracy in the age of AI, the idea of a human transactional relationship does not necessarily seem to dominate .

The other risk is, of course, the economic and political influence that certain players could bring to bear on AI. In this respect, and insofar as these technologies are becoming increasingly widespread, it would seem appropriate to consider prohibiting any use of computer code that is not fully auditable.

## 2.3 What virtuous practices for democracy in the age of AI?

We understand that it is therefore essential to better understand what new forms of practice might emerge, and to share as widely as possible their benefits, but also the problems they might create. Our survey of 100 initiatives shows that there are many avenues of analysis for not only strengthening but also reinventing democratic governance.

The most virtuous practices consist, for example, in using AI to help participants better master a subject in relation to a vote. In the case of choices related to urban planning, it is important for voters to have a general understanding of the many constraints (traffic, safety, architectural continuity, global warming, etc.) in order to make an informed decision. An AI model can help answer the most varied and detailed questions. This, for example, is the aim of the **Transforming Citizen service with AI** initiative

In the case of open consultations, where the aim is to collect written responses, solutions such as **Pol.is** (Taiwan) can be used to classify these responses into more or less segmented categories. These systems partially neutralize the bias of the readers responsible for synthesizing the responses, who are generally biased. They are also capable of generating syntheses of varying sizes for different interlocutors. Figure 5 details some of these initiatives.

**Initiatives that are dedicated to reinventing approaches to democratic governance can foster innovative projects using a range of strategies, such as...**

| ...Enhancing transparency and accountability among democratic governance entities | ...Challenging various problematic algorithmic impacts | ...Democratizing AI and Global Governance |
|---|---|---|
| OPERAÇÃO SERENATA DE AMOR | Algo Transparency | Constitutional AI |
| **Type**: AI-bot<br>**Initiators**: Digital Ocean (Company), Open Knowledge Brazil (Civil Society Organization)<br>**Objective**: Auditing public accounts and enhancing social control through AI<br>**Offer**: AI-bot that monitors Parliamentary payments | **Type**: NGO<br>**Initiators**: AlgoTransparency (NGO)<br>**Objective**: Examining and showing the impact of YouTube's algorithms, in a world where artificial intelligence controls what people watch<br>**Offer**: Public articles | **Type**: LLM<br>**Initiators**: The Collective Intelligence Project (incubator), Anthropic (AI Company)<br>**Objective**: Promoting alignment with public values in AI language model behavior<br>**Offer**: Training LLM with publicly-derived principles |
| **Origin**: Brazil / **Scope**: Brazil | **Origin**: France / **Scope**: Worldwide | **Origin**: / **Scope**: |
| **Public Financing**: None / **Private Financing**: Crowdfunding | **Public Financing**: UC Berkeley School of Law (US), Berkeley School of Information (US), Human Rights Center (US), CITRIS (US), and more / **Private Financing**: Moz://a (US), Graphika (US), Center for Humane Technology (US), Tracking Exposed (Italy), EU DisinfoLab (Belgium) | **Public Financing**: None / **Private Financing**: Anthropic (US); The Omidyar Foundation (US), Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (US), Google.Org (US), and more |
| **Budget:** Less than $100k | **Budget:** N/A | **Budget:** N/A |
| Link: https://serenata.ai/ | Link: https://www.algotransparency.org/ | Link: https://www.cip.org/blog/ccai |

**Figure 5 - Emblematic initiatives reinventing democratic governance**

# 3. The temptation of an exclusively algorithmic democracy: is AI stronger than democracy?

**The latest trend** is that of liquid democracy, taken to its extreme by a libertarian philosophy of democracy enabled by AI. According to its promoters, the digital revolution (AI, CAD, etc.) offers a new way of life unprecedented in the history of civilization[20] : that of a society that is both horizontal and dogma-free; without the verticality of industrial societies, or the religiosity or transcendent truth of medieval societies. This current of thought, embodied by many Silicon Valley CEOs, is part of a messianic rhetoric carried notably by Peter Thiel, for whom freedom prevails over democracy itself.

## 3.1 The objectivity of algorithms

*"The main question is how to escape [to freedom] not via politics, but beyond. [...] We are in a death race between politics and technology. [...] Politics means interfering with other people's lives without their consent."*

[20] Lewis Carroll, *The Principle of Parliamentary Representation* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1884).

*Peter Thiel - 2009 - "A Libertarian's Education*

Peter Thiel is one of Silicon Valley's intellectual watchdogs, asserting the primacy of freedom and efficiency over democracy[21] . As one of Trump's closest thinkers on technology, he is also a catalyst for the ideology that dominates the world of technology, in the USA and often beyond: one that postulates a form of objectivity inherent in market dynamics, just like within computer code, just like the entrepreneur's intention, forces that would be qualitatively superior to the convolutions of the complexity of political decision-making processes. As a result, the very principle of counter-power would be suspect insofar as it tends to deviate from the "living source"[22] of the entrepreneur's intention. Thiel is a regular advocate of a principle in which nations are governed by fully empowered CEOs, and technology and algorithms serve that CEO's vision. Not surprisingly, he was one of the first to spot the potential of the Ethereum blockchain technology, a form of digital infrastructure enabling the implementation of "smart-contracts" or DAOs (Decentralized Autonomous Organizations), one of the cornerstones of what could be an autonomous, algorithmic democracy.

At a time when it seems likely that algorithms and AI will take on many of the tasks previously performed by humans, it is important to understand that true objectivity does not exist. An algorithm, however sophisticated it may be, simply reproduces the biases of the person who programmed it, or those induced in the data used to train it. The notion of counter-power is therefore central to the world of AI.

## 3.2 A libertarian impulse essentially financed by Silicon Valley

The libertarian school of thought is supported by many CEOs of digital companies investing in AI (Figure 2 - Top funders). The state and liberal democracy not only hinder innovation and the efficiency of algorithms, but are even perceived as liberticidal. This current of thought promotes a liquid democracy based on the wisdom of crowds, putting an end to the Ancien Régime not only of monarchies but also of representative democracies.

This reflects a tendency among tech players to think that representative democracy is slowing down progress, and that measures protecting fundamental democratic principles in the age of AI are actually problems. In his first executive orders, for example, President Trump rescinded

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (United States: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943). *The Fountainhead* is one of philosopher Ayn Rand's works. It is an ode to the entrepreneurial spirit and freedom, in which the main character exclaims "The question isn't who is going to let me; it's who is going to stop me". His other line of force is the notion of *Objectivism*: the fact that (objective) reality exists independently of the observer's mind. .Thus, the 'heroic entrepreneur' is the one who, against all odds, fights to bring about a new state of affairs, opposed by the bureaucrats defending the status quo.

Biden's executive order on AI regulation. All these players share a sincere belief that code is inherently efficient. Responding to market efficiency, code and AI embody both freedom and efficiency.

This paradigm shift poses a major challenge to representative democracy, and calls for some tough decisions. Can we delegate democratic or even regal decisions such as justice to AI? What is the morality of robots? Can we really believe in the wisdom of crowds, even in the presence of community or moderation ratings in a context where citizens can be overwhelmed by a cascade of disinformation? How transparent are the underlying algorithms, especially when they are privatized by new tech oligarchies? Here we see the extraordinary shift from the Valley, cradle of the anti-system hippies of the 60s, to the system.

Figure 3 of the top funders in AI reveals not only the predominance of American tech giants, driven by this messianic vision (with the notable exception of Bill Gates), but also the remarkable absence of European players. Europe confines itself to its more traditional role of regulatory watchdog.

As well as raising legitimate concerns about the digital sovereignty of European countries, this also calls into question our ability to think for ourselves about the systems and institutions we would like to have in a world where AI would be omnipresent. Elon Musk's initiatives to have algorithms take over public decisions and services in the "Department of government efficiency" are no longer a dystopia, but a reality!

## Dystopia

Marc had tried to put an end to his addiction to AI-based Social Networks (ASNs), those next-generation social networks where AI-enhanced virtual reality created worlds as synthetic as they were addictive. But every time, the power of algorithms dominated. It's true that his world had become much smaller in recent years. After campaigning in the 2030s for the National Insurgent Coalition and clashing with other activists on two or three occasions, he had turned in on himself. Politics, that world of small-minded punks, seemed to him just a vehicle for invective where, in any case, the party with the best social networking algorithm won the day. As a result, his spectrum of interests had gradually narrowed, with e-commerce and drone meal orders completing his isolation. And then, on a national scale, faced with ever-growing public debt, a public salvation committee entrusted a super-intelligent XLLM AI -marIAnne- with absolute responsibility for a very large number of public policies. A few days ago, two URSSAF doctor-investigators paid him a visit: marIAnne had detected depressive behavior in the way he typed on his keyboard[23] . They had explained to him that their approach was above all benevolent, but that insofar as depression would induce a risk of sick leave and an additional

[23] Claudia Vesel et al, "Effects of Mood and Aging on Keystroke Dynamics Metadata and Their Diurnal Patterns in a Large Open-Science Sample: A BiAffect iOS Study," *Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association* 27, no. 7 (2020): 1007-1018, https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7647317/.

cost on public finances, it was necessary for him to carry out empathic exchange sessions with a specialized AI model[24] , designed to reduce this risk. Marc felt he was the plaything of technologies which, under the guise of simplifying things for him, took away all autonomy and meaning in his life.

## Conclusion: The coming civilization

How can we write a desirable future for AI and democracy? First of all, we need to avoid two pitfalls. The first is to attribute to AI and technology an autonomous force that they do not have. The second is to underestimate the disruptive capacities of AI on democracies. We always have the possibility of making choices that are essential... The current risk is to leave the debate on the future era of AI to a few individuals. Society, workers and trade unions need to be involved in the AI debate. This, too, is one of the aims of this reflexive analysis of initiatives around AI and democracy, and of this AI summit in Paris in 2025.

To find a way forward, we need to diagnose the crisis of representative democracies, which goes beyond AI and grasps the scale of the civilizational shock. We need to respond to citizens' anger at the disruptions of capitalism, but also to their loneliness in a digital society. If algorithms generate ever more impulses, emotions and irrationality, technology amplifies anger, but is not the source of our latent impulses.

This is above all due to post-industrial society, marked by the transition from class-based societies to societies of isolated individuals, where emotions play a much greater role in voting than social classes or ideologies. A recent study highlights the loneliness of Homo numéricus: between 2000 and 2024, the proportion of Americans who dine alone every night rose from 15% to 30%. At the same time, the proportion of Americans who say they can trust others fell from 50% to 25%. [25]

In addition, the decline in physical social ties means that people have fewer and fewer "unpleasant conversations", as the economist Robert Putnam observes: frank discussions with people who don't have the same opinion as us, but whom we used to meet in "real life", at the café, in military service, in church, at the market, in public services, all places which are disappearing due to the digitization of these services or the fact that we now spend seven hours a day in front of screens.

[24] Han Li et al, "Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of AI-Based Conversational Agents for Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being," *NPJ Digital Medicine* 6, no. 1 (2023): 236, https://www.nature.com/articles/s41746-023-00979-5.

[25] Yann Algan, Corin Blanc and Claudia Sénik, *World Happiness Report 2025*

In this context, reinventing a desirable path for democracy in the age of AI requires at least four types of action.

- The first is to tackle the causes of the anger generated by the digital revolution. If anti-system voters distrust democracy, it's because they are not sufficiently protected by institutions and companies against disruptions. How can we create *good jobs* in the age of AI, in line with the work of Nobel Prize-winning economist Daron Acemoglu 2024 and economist Dani Rodrik?

- The second is to recreate spaces for sociability. Virtual links don't cure the desire to live in the flesh among human beings. Human beings need local democratic engagement with spaces for discussion outside social networks. How can we recreate trade unions and places of socialization in the workplace and the regions in the age of digital society and AI?

- The third is to regain control of algorithms through an alliance of citizens, trade unions and political parties - all living social bodies that are indispensable to democracy. The hypothesis of creating a citizens' body charged with a mission whose ambition could go as far as covering the design, production, supervision and appeals linked to the use of AI in public services could be appropriate.

Actions in this field include: Creating a citizen intermediary body to oversee the use of AI; Drawing inspiration from the Swiss model of the citizen army for a democratic oversight committee for algorithms; Regularly reporting technological developments to the population; or Identifying decisions requiring an "emotional transfer" (justice, social welfare, ethics).

- Finally, the fourth action is Education. How to form a society aware of the challenges of AI and the development of an AI culture. Crucial actions in this field include: Developing a collective AI culture ("CaféIA", citizen debates); Integrating AI and digital education into school curricula. (Safer Internet Day - Digital Citizenship & AI).

But if education is there to develop academic skills to master the challenges of tech and AI, it also has a crucial role in developing social skills. How to learn to work in a group from the earliest age to teach cooperation and trust, the cement of representative democracies, is one of the essential objectives of 21st century education! [26]

[26] Yann Algan and Élise Huillery, *Économie du savoir-être* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2022).

## Utopia

A month earlier, Marc had turned eighteen. The idea of taking his driving test had occurred to him, but seeing that autonomous vehicles were now taking off in a big way, he decided against it. And anyway, he was running out of time. The following week, he had agreed to join the Service citoyen, AI section. He was to spend 3 months studying the algorithms that made recommendations on the allocation of social aid. By fine-tuning these algorithms, it became possible to better target recipients, no longer favoring those who had benefited from good support in completing their administrative files, but focusing on individuals in real need: single women with children, populations with writing difficulties, etc. His expertise in artificial intelligence naturally predisposed him to this role, to which he was required by law to allocate 3 months of his working time every three years. This obviously involved analyzing the AI models used, but also taking part in conferences, speaking at schools and universities, and producing research documents to disseminate the results of his work as widely and transparently as possible. The scheme was introduced as part of France's constitutional reform of 2032, which established a Sixth Republic. After years of crisis that will go down in history as the Gilets Orange, it had seemed necessary to introduce more citizen participation into French institutions. The quid pro quo was that civic obligations had increased, and everyone was now expected to give a share of their time to the community. After nearly three years of debate, two main ideas prevailed. The first was that, for a whole host of reasons, it was necessary to rebuild society by spending more time together. The idea of a widely extended civic service had gradually gained consensus. For some, it was a matter of helping the young to acquire a taste for reading, for others of relearning how to cook to avoid frozen and industrialized food, and so on. The second was that the state and public institutions could embrace artificial intelligence, provided that a general culture of AI was promoted and that algorithms were under the real scrutiny of both parliament and citizens. For several years, the CaféIA initiative had been introducing tens of millions of French citizens to the challenges of AI; this served as the basis for the launch of the Service citoyen, with its AI component. Its role quickly became central. Some were producing computer code in consultation with users of a public counter, for new forms of AI-based services. Others took protests into account and took part in an appeals board to ensure fair treatment, while others ensured that the algorithms worked properly and that their integrity and cybersecurity were guaranteed.

After decades of upheaval, France had once again become a nation of peace, solidarity and openness to the world. Its message of Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité was once again admired as that of a nation that had rediscovered its roots in modernity.