FORUM | INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR DEMOCRATIC STUDIES

HIGHLIGHTS:
SETTING DEMOCRATIC GROUND RULES FOR AI

Advances in artificial intelligence (AI) are transforming political landscapes, impacting how people exercise their rights, and presenting new challenges to democratic principles such as privacy, transparency, accountable governance, and non-discrimination. Democratic AI governance is critical, yet significant barriers to engagement in this area remain. Drawing upon conversations from a private workshop in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the International Forum for Democratic Studies compiled an overview of eight key challenges to and opportunities for the democratic governance of AI.

1. **AI technologies reflect the human choices and structures behind them.** The wide range of technologies described by the term "AI" are shaped by human choices about design and deployment, as well as the social and political contexts that feed into training data. Like all human products, they must be open to challenge by democratic activists and institutions.

2. **The risks and harms associated with AI challenge traditional assumptions.** These impacts can arise at all stages of the AI pipeline, from development to procurement to use, and they may demand new ways of thinking about issues like data protection.

3. **Opacity around AI hinders democratic engagement.** AI systems from surveillance cameras to social-media algorithms already work in the background of our daily lives, and the institutions that deploy them often prefer not to share the details. This reluctance, as well as the inherent complexity of AI systems, can make it hard to map the impacts of these tools.

4. **Addressing AI impacts will require more than just technical expertise.** Because AI risks and harms have social and political roots, they will also require social and political responses. Moreover, these responses may sometimes demand trade-offs between competing democratic values.

5. **Democracies must close institutional gaps and widen participation in AI governance.** Democratic institutions remain broadly unprepared to manage AI harms. Technical expertise on AI is concentrated in the private sector, which places democracies and their publics at a disadvantage in key decision-making processes—many of which exclude civil society and marginalized communities.

6. **New mechanisms and enduring democratic principles both have important roles to play.** Democratic governance of AI may require building specialized institutions, but it also hinges on finding ways to apply existing democratic laws and principles effectively when AI tools enter the picture.

7. **Tech expertise within civil society can help influence the trajectory of AI technologies.** Cutting-edge civil society groups are leveraging their technical skills to pinpoint government or corporate systems' vulnerabilities; model more inclusive, representative, and responsible approaches to design; and develop AI tools to support civic accountability activities.

8. **The complexity of AI governance makes cross-sectoral collaboration crucial.** AI governance challenges cut across traditional sectoral boundaries. New partnerships and knowledge-sharing initiatives that bring together digital rights groups, traditional human rights groups, journalists, trade unions, teachers, and others can enable civil society organizations to address these issues more effectively.

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