INTRODUCING: IRI'S GENERATIVE AI AND DEMOCRACY WORKING GROUP

Increased public awareness about generative artificial intelligence (AI), which was launched into the spotlight with the release of ChatGPT in late 2022, presents both opportunities and harms to democratic societies. As generative AI dominated the public conversation, with ChatGPT becoming the fastest-growing consumer application in history, the International Republican Institute (IRI) began to receive partner requests for support to prepare for current and potential impacts caused by generative AI. In response, IRI's Technology and Democracy Practice launched the Generative AI and Democracy Working Group to speak to this need. IRI's Technology and Democracy Practice works to ensure that digital technologies are developed, deployed, governed, and used in line with democratic values.

This working group, launched in November 2023, creates a collaborative space for democratic actors, including representatives from civil society, academia, industry, and policy, to discuss the impacts AI will have on democracies, with a particular focus on trends in the Global South. The intent is to fill a gap in knowledge that may widen as AI continues to evolve, providing guidance to civil society and policymakers on how to maximize the benefits and minimize the harms of generative AI to democracy.

The first convening of the working group was held on November 1st, 2023. Six sessions will be held in total, culminating in the release of a white paper synthesizing findings in the summer of 2024.

To share a sneak peek of this project's early findings, **below is a snapshot of early risks, challenges, and potential opportunities for democratic actors.** These trends were identified over the course of 23 expert interviews to help inform the working group's agenda. Participants represented countries from across the globe, as well as diverse sectors including civil society, policy, industry, and academia. IRI's Technology and Democracy Practice hopes these insights provide helpful framing for how experts around the world are thinking about the impacts of generative AI on democracy.

What is Generative AI?

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) describes algorithms that can be used to create new content, including text, images, or other media by learning the patterns and structures of their input training data and then generating new data with similar characteristics.

RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES & LOOKING AHEAD ⟶

⚠ EARLY RISKS AND CHALLENGES:

1 Insufficient Digital Literacy:

Key democratic stakeholders, especially policymakers, do not understand the basics of generative AI. **Policies have been introduced that do not reflect a strong awareness of the technology's threats, and there are fears ill-informed regulation will persist as hype around AI continues.** The gap in understanding is widening between decision-makers in the Global South and Global North, magnifying an existing digital divide and concerns about those in the Global South being left behind.

2 Amplified Information Integrity Threats:

The proliferation of misleading content created by generative AI will worsen existing challenges to democracies' information ecosystems as **generative AI can significantly reduce the cost of creating misleading content.** Exacerbating this issue is the fact that AI models are more likely to spread falsehoods in non-English speaking contexts, primarily because non-English algorithms are trained on weak or inaccurate foreign language datasets.

3 Minimal Transparency:

Finally, there is **a lack of transparency on how generative AI is used by governments, as well as how these tools are developed.** Civil society groups struggle to facilitate tech company and government collaboration, as each have divergent priorities. A frequent end result is that civil society voices are left out of critical conversations regarding AI creation, development, and deployment.

💡 POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES:

1 Improved Government Productivity:

Generative AI could **streamline the work of officials and their staff by eliminating tasks seen as time-consuming, tedious, or repetitive.** From summarizing meeting notes to simplifying policy research, generative AI could significantly reduce the day-to-day workloads of government employees. Additionally, generative AI can be used to analyze and disaggregate data to assist policymakers in high-level decision-making processes.

2 Inclusive Participatory Governance:

Generative AI can **make it easier for average citizens to weigh in on nuanced policy debates more easily by synthesizing complex information.** For example, summarizing government documents to improve readability may empower constituents to become more civically engaged. Looking ahead, experts felt generative AI, if used appropriately, could improve the dynamic between citizens and their officials, offering more inclusive and accessible ways to participate.

3 Strengthened Information Ecosystems:

Lastly, generative AI can counter information integrity threats. **It can rapidly sort through content found across platforms, identifying and labeling information that may be misleading or problematic.** For content moderators, many of whom have limited capacity, generative AI could make their work and the systems they rely on more efficient and effective.

LOOKING AHEAD - KEY TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS:

These findings reflect the priorities of IRI's Technology and Democracy Practice in the coming months, as they plan to touch upon these issues in future working group convenings. Upcoming discussion topics include current and potential harms of generative AI to democracy, impacts to information environments, issues of transparency, opportunities for positive use, and regulatory approaches, among others.

Highlights from discussions, as well as conversations with experts external to the working group, will be forthcoming, so please stay tuned! **This project will culminate in the release of a white paper summarizing conclusions from the working group in 2024.** If you have any questions or would like to learn more, please reach out to Amanda Zink at azink@iri.org.