



DEM-36

A CHARTER FOR DEMOCRATIC
RENEWAL IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Discussion Paper

Democracy and AI

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A Dem36 Discussion Paper

Background

This Discussion Paper references and expands upon the ideas for reform contained within Dem36's draft Charter for Democratic Renewal in South Australia. Specifically, the following within section 3.4 'Our Democratic Culture':

- World-leading safeguards to protect against cyber threats, including misinformation and disinformation.
- Exploration of the use of AI and digital technologies to strengthen individuals' agency, inclusion and wellbeing while protecting their rights and preventing undemocratic use of citizens' personal data.

Vision

We will create a future where artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies strengthen our democratic processes while safeguarding institutional integrity. We are committed to harnessing AI to amplify citizen voices, foster inclusive participation, enhance government services, and ensure elections and public debate remain free, fair, and informed. AI and digital technologies will contribute to a resilient democracy that empowers citizens and strengthens social cohesion.

Democracy's adaptive challenge

Democracy has proven resilient through adapting to transformative technologies—from the printing press to radio, television, and the internet. AI may represent the next chapter in this ongoing story of democratic adaptation, or it may constitute something more fundamentally transformative in its capacity to reshape how we create, share, and process information.

Whether an evolution or a revolution in democratic practice, the challenge remains the same: how we can embed democratic values, accountabilities, and public benefit into AI's development and deployment to strengthen rather than undermine democratic institutions.

AI presents both opportunities and risks. Without proper safeguards, AI-generated content can spread misinformation, while algorithmic biases and tech-driven processes without appropriate human oversight can lead to discriminatory outcomes in public administration—as Australia's Robodebt program demonstrated. Similar concerns are now emerging about algorithmic decision-making for determining aged care support. Concentrated corporate control of AI technologies and the rapid pace of advancement challenge government capacity to regulate effectively. Citizens face growing difficulty distinguishing fact from fiction in increasingly complex and fragmented information environments and some are concerned about misuse of personal data and government overreach.

Yet these challenges are matched by significant opportunities. AI can strengthen democratic participation through improved access to information, more efficient and responsive government services, and help to manage the time, cost and complexity of civic engagement. When designed with democratic principles at their core, AI systems can help bridge divides, amplify underrepresented voices, and make governance more transparent and accountable. The key is ensuring that AI development serves the public interest, with appropriate oversight and meaningful public participation in shaping how these technologies are developed and deployed.

What are we already doing about the challenge?

At the national level, Australia is implementing a multi-faceted approach to harness AI's potential while managing risks. The Electoral Integrity Assurance Taskforce advises on potential threats. The Department of Industry, Science and Resources has established Australia's AI Ethics Framework and published a National AI Plan. The Digital Transformation Agency has conducted AI trials and developed training for public servants. The Data and Digital Ministers' Meeting works towards maintaining a nationally consistent approach.

At the state level, the South Australian Government has established a \$200m Digital Investment Fund, with modernisation of the parliamentary election system identified as a priority. The government has introduced legislation to ban deepfake election advertising, led work on AI use in schools, and invested in civics education. Strategic policies, oversight mechanisms and

guidelines for AI use focus on privacy and information security. In late January 2026, the government opened consultation on a South Australian AI strategy.

Government efforts are reinforced by civil society organisations supporting the development of tools to respond to misinformation and assess human rights impacts of AI-driven systems. Initiatives in public interest journalism, media literacy, and fact-checking tools support civic education and critical thinking by citizens.

What more could we do about the challenge?

To realise AI's democratic potential in South Australia, we propose:

- **Create an integrated State AI Plan:** engage the South Australian public in the development of a clear public purpose for AI development and adoption, with specific objectives in areas that include job augmentation and job creation, security, health, education, social justice and social cohesion.

Examples: [Taiwan's citizen-led approach to AI](#), '[Wicked Decluttering](#)' of permitting processes, ALERTCalifornia for [faster wildfire detection](#), [individualised education plans](#), [transport planning](#), Citizen Lab's [Go Vocal platform](#) for analysing public consultation data.

- **Mandate participatory AI governance:** require both business and government to engage the not-for-profit sector and citizens in AI oversight to foster public trust, align AI development with societal values and human rights, and uncover potential issues early.

Examples: Spanish Supreme Court ruling on [legitimacy of algorithmic decision-making](#), human rights impact [assessment tool for AI in banking](#), [Amsterdam's participatory AI development](#).

- **Invest in AI's potential for democratic good:** highlight, develop and scale successful uses of AI in strengthening elections, public service delivery and civic engagement. Use procurement levers to require private sector AI vendors to support public projects through financial and in-kind contributions, such as establishment of a public sector innovation fund and releasing staff for work on public sector service delivery projects.

Examples: [AI procurement checklists](#) and private-public + academic sector partnerships, City of San Francisco's [Civic Bridge program for private-public partnering](#), civic chatbots that [share reliable election information](#), [AI-enabled text simplification](#) to help people with limited language skills, UNDP/ ITU's [AI for Good](#) initiative.

- **Strengthen information-sharing:** create engaging ways to share information across sectors and with the public, to support informed public debate and policy responses.

Examples: WIRED's global effort to [track the use of AI in elections](#), [frameworks and institutions for electoral integrity](#), [Brazil's Experiment in AI-Powered Participation](#), and [legislative transparency in California](#).

Further reading / resources

- Australian Government: [Strengthening Australian Democracy](#)
- Australian Government: [National AI Plan](#)
- Australian Human Rights Commission: [Final Report: Human Rights and Technology](#)
- Australian Resilient Democracy Network: [Artificial Intelligence, False Information, and Electoral Integrity Perceptions](#)
- South Australia: Select Committee on Artificial Intelligence (report tabled 14 Nov 2023)
- South Australian Government: [Office for AI](#)
- South Australian Government: An artificial intelligence strategy for the South Australian Government - [Discussion Paper](#)
- The Govlab & The Burnes Center for Social Change: [Rebooting Democracy in the Age of AI](#) (case studies and articles)
- [Artificial intelligence \(AI\) in action: A preliminary review of AI use for democracy support](#) - Policy paper, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, Sep 2024.
- OECD, 2025: [Tackling civic participation challenges with emerging technologies - Beyond the hype](#)
- OECD, 2025: [Governing with Artificial Intelligence - The State of Play and Way Forward in Core Government Functions](#)