

INTRODUCTION

(EDITORIAL)

Liberal democracy is increasingly tested not only by institutional pressures and geopolitical shocks, but also by the accelerated transformation of the public sphere – its infrastructures, its communicative norms, and its repertoires of persuasion. In recent years, the language of politics has become simultaneously more ubiquitous and more fragile: ubiquitous, because digital platforms multiply the channels of participation and visibility; fragile, because the meanings of key concepts are continuously contested, compressed into slogans, and strategically reframed. At the same time, artificial intelligence – first as a system of ranking and recommendation, then as moderation and automated governance, and now also as large-scale generation of content – has begun to co-shape the very conditions under which democratic societies argue, decide, and consent.

This special volume of *Politeja* grows out of the research project *Democracy – Technological Transformation – Society* (DeTS).¹ DeTS examines the relations between contemporary liberal democracy, political language, and AI as an emerging tool of power. Its guiding assumption is that democratic resilience depends not only on procedures – elections, representation, checks and balances – but also on the communicative and cultural conditions that make those procedures meaningful: shared standards of public justification, a minimum of epistemic trust, and the ability to disagree without destroying the space for common action. The volume therefore approaches AI not as a neutral instrument, but as part of a rapidly evolving socio-technical environment that can amplify both democratic capacities and anti-democratic tendencies.

The authors gathered here – an interdisciplinary team from Poland and abroad – share a critical ambition: to diagnose the pressures that AI-mediated communication places on democracy in crisis, and to identify where, how, and why democratic practices may be strengthened or weakened. The contributions follow the three interconnected planes central to DeTS:

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- (1) liberal democracy and its crisis;
- (2) language as a strategy of ‘reality formatting’ and the engineering of meanings;
- (3) AI as an infrastructure of visibility, influence, and governance.

Across these planes runs a common thread: the struggle over semantic and cognitive sovereignty – in short: who defines the relevant categories of political reality, whose speech becomes visible, which interpretations come to the fore, and which voices are heard or silenced through technical, cultural, or institutional mechanisms.

The volume is organized into thematic clusters with overlapping concerns rather than rigid boundaries:

1. Diagnoses of democratic crisis under new communicative conditions. These papers revisit classical and contemporary accounts of liberal democracy – its normative promises and its vulnerabilities – by foregrounding the changing ecology of public discourse. They show how polarisation, populist mobilisation, and distrust are entangled with transformations in the production and circulation of political meaning. Rather than treating ‘crisis’ as a single phenomenon, these articles read it as a layered process: gradual erosion of democratic culture, fragmentation of publics, and the weakening of the conditions for compromise and deliberation.

2. Language, concept drift, and political legitimation in the age of post-truth. The second cluster moves from institutional diagnoses to the micro- and meso-level of political language. The authors examine how basic concepts like: ‘freedom’, ‘rule of law’, ‘sovereignty’, ‘security’, ‘rights’, and ‘nation’, are re-coded in contested environments. Several articles analyze rhetorical and discursive techniques through which political actors legitimate authority, delegitimize opponents, and engineer ‘common sense’ through selective descriptions of reality. Here, DeTS’s emphasis on language as a tool of thought becomes especially significant: when meanings shift, the boundaries of what citizens can imagine as politically possible shift as well.² The papers also highlight the democratic cost of post-truth, when persuasion is replaced by affective orientation, and where the public sphere becomes less a space of argument and more a space of political performance.

3. AI as political infrastructure: moderation, production, and the redistribution of power. The third cluster focuses directly on AI: its use in politics, its capacity to scale influence, and its role in reconfiguring governance and administration. The authors address AI as an infrastructure that shapes visibility (through ranking and recommendation), participation (through moderation and platform governance), and persuasion (through microtargeting and synthetic content). The papers explore the emerging paradox of AI in democratic settings: the same systems that can lower barriers to participation (translation, summarisation, civic information tools) can also increase passivity, enable manipulation, and deepen asymmetries between those who control computational infrastructures and those who are subjected to their outputs. Several

² R. Dahl, *Polyarchy. Participation and Opposition*, New Haven–London 1971, pp. 1-20; J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. W. Rehg, Cambridge 1996, pp. 287-328; L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, London 1922/2001, pp. 68-75; J. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, London 1952, pp. 1-12.

contributions consider the institutional implications: how public administration may be remodeled by automated decision-support, what accountability and transparency can mean when systems are opaque, and how democratic safeguards might be redesigned under conditions of rapid technological change.

In sum, the papers collected in this volume offer no single verdict on AI and democracy – neither technological optimism nor deterministic pessimism. Instead, they provide a critical map of risks, mechanisms, and possible countermeasures. By bringing these perspectives into dialogue, we invite readers into contemporary political and cultural debates around a central question posed by DeTS: to what extent can AI-co-moderated narratives and discourses sustain democratic agency, and to what extent can they become instruments for governing attention, opinion, and, ultimately, political choice?

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