

Practical steps towards democracy fit for a world with AI

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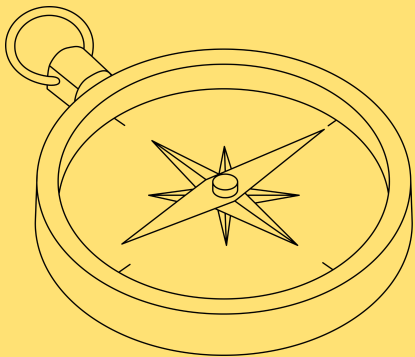
Two goals:

1. Make the case for deliberative processes.
2. Model a way of thinking about governance strategy / design.

-  Aus →  UK →  US
- Currently: AI & Democracy Foundation
 MIT
- Research: recommender systems peace + conflict
 societal impacts deliberative democracy
 AI governance institution design
- E.g.: Advise platforms, regulators
 Peace processes (ISPL)

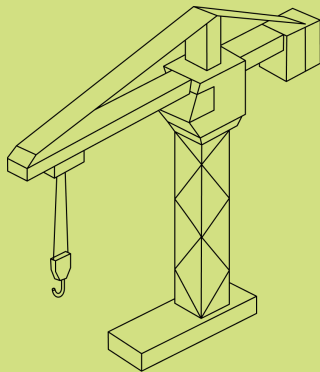
Strategy

Developing ways to address critical gaps in our democratic systems.



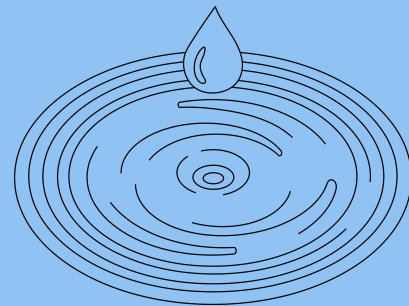
Capacity-building

Building out the 'supply' of democratic systems that fill those gaps.



Adoption

Unlocking 'demand' for adoption of these critical democratic systems.



Challenges

- Power concentration

- Coordination

- Disempowerment

- Information

Strategy

- Deliberation

- Enablers

Application

- Ex 1: Action

- Ex 2: Optionality

- Ex 3: Drift

Case for Australia

Challenges

Power concentration

Coordination

Disempowerment

Information

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Deliberation

Enablers

Application

Ex 1: Action

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Power concentration

In the form of:

- a small number of companies and the countries in which they are located **controlling the majority of AI infrastructure** that underpins economic activity, state capacity, or the public sphere;
- incentives to make context available to AI systems creating **surveillance infrastructure** which can be abused;
- the emergence of **automated organizations** — where a small number of people control a large population of compliant AI agents — undermining many of the **implicit guardrails** that normally act as a check on the influence of any single person.

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Coordination and collective action failures

For example if:

- race dynamics (real or perceived) lead to corner-cutting on critical risk mitigation measures;
- there is a proliferation of biological weapons, exacerbated by convergence risks across AI and biology; or
- a proliferation of offensive cyber capabilities overcomes defensive cybersecurity measures.

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Disempowerment pressure

Such as:

- **economic activity** increasingly being driven by AI systems rather than humans;
- governments becoming increasingly dependent on AI systems, rather than human constituents, for **tax revenue**;
- **information and culture** being increasingly driven by the AI systems that mediate them; or
- our capabilities **atrophy**ing, beliefs becoming **less accurate**, value judgments **shifting away** from those we actually hold, or our actions becoming **misaligned with our values** as a result of our interactions with AI systems.

Jan Kulveit et al. (2025) "Gradual Disempowerment: ..."; Luke Drago + Rudolf (2025) "The Intelligence Curse"; Mrinank Sharma et al. (2026) "Who's in Charge? Disempowerment Patterns in Real-World LLM Usage"; Grace Liu et al. (2026) "AI Assistance Reduces Persistence and Hurts Independent Performance"

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Degraded information environment

As AI undermines (at least in the short term):

- the load-bearing **frictions** that currently signal effort, authenticity, accuracy, sincerity, or humanity, and
- our ability to form **common knowledge**.

Without new mechanisms to perform these functions, it will become increasingly difficult to make sense of our rapidly changing world and make informed collective decisions.

Zeynep Tufekci (2025) "Are We Having the Wrong Nightmares About AI?"

Megan Hyska (2026) "Deepfakes, Public Announcements, and Political Mobilization"

MORE CERTAIN

LESS CERTAIN

AI poses significant governance challenges

MORE CERTAIN

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coordination challenges

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environments

...

LESS CERTAIN

AI poses significant
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Given uncertainty, we
should invest in flexible
governance **building blocks**

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LESS CERTAIN

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deliberative processes

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representative agents

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case-based systems

degraded information
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bargaining systems

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That can be used across many possible **future institutions**

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market intermediaries

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(Representative) deliberative processes

population microcosm

+

information microcosm

A **representative**
microcosm of constituents,
often randomly selected.

The **time + resources** to
learn from and **deliberate**
with $\subseteq$ {each other, experts,
stakeholders, etc.}

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Many different forms. Major axes of variation include:

- whether the process is **offline, online, or hybrid**;
- the **number of people** involved;
- the **duration** of the process;
- the **output "shape"**; and
- what participants actually do during the process (the "**process design**").

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(Representative) deliberative processes



Such processes have a long history (versions were used in **ancient Athens** and **Renaissance Italy**) and variations on them are widely used (over 1000 processes have been run in recent decades) by many different institutions, from **religions**, to **banks** and **utility companies**, to **national governments** and **supranational entities**.

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(Representative) deliberative processes

Good facilitators are skilled at process design and will ensure that, to the extent possible with the available resources:

- participants are **informed** about the topic;
- participants **substantively deliberate** about what should be done;
- the process is **accessible** to all participants;
- the process is not **disproportionately influenced** by any small subset of participants;
- the process **delivers a decision** on its remit; and
- the output of the process is **feasible / actually implementable**.

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Things that (deliberative) democracy enables you to do

Enable action

Address inaction / status quo bias

Create a mandate / political 'cover'

Share decision risk

Overcome gridlock

Understand trade-offs

Demonstrate Pareto optimality /
convince stakeholders of reality of
trade-offs

Fairly allocate benefits (+ costs)

Reduce incentives for race to bottom

Build reputation + trust

Signal benign intent

Confidence building measure

Epistemics

Elicit considered public will

Coordination

Surface common ground

Reduce defection

Provide stability by guarantees on
process

Competition / accountability

Show difference between public will
and unilateral decisions

Moral high ground (via democratic
mandate)

Perceived legitimacy

Robustness

Prevent capture

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Qualification: very realpolitik!

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Example 1: Enabling action

Organisations may struggle to take action for multiple reasons:

- action costly for decision-makers, while harms caused by inaction are not felt;
- bureaucracy may make action harder than willpower can overcome;
- benefits of taking action can often be speculative which means generating buy-in and momentum can be hard.

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E.g., National Citizens' Assembly on AI and Copyright

- If:
- on merit, important for AI training to be allowed;
 - blocker is 5-6 large copyright holders (ABC, SBS, NewsCorp, ...); and
 - regular people don't understand nuance;

Then: a national deliberative process would help create a mandate that it would be difficult to attack.

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Example 2: Preserving optionality

Policy decisions made unilaterally (or with insufficient consultation) can cause ~politicisation, which:

- reduces the space of possible future policy actions (e.g., climate, pandemic), including by 'poisoning the well';
- makes nuance more difficult.

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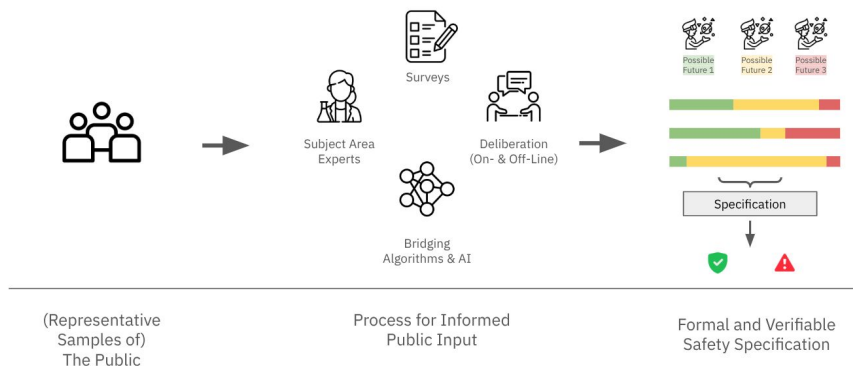
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E.g., Deliberative Safety Specifications



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Example 3: Avoiding drift

Robustly aligning organisations with a public-interest purpose is hard. If there are opportunities to gain significant profit or wield significant power, purpose tends to drift, usually due to:

- inarticulacy in how the purpose is measured or operationalised;
- self-scoring by those responsible for pursuing the purpose; and/or
- capture by external actors.

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E.g., Public Evaluation of Public Benefit in PBCs

Frontier labs have public benefit purposes: * Anthropic – “responsibly develop and maintain advanced AI for the long term benefit of humanity”; □ OpenAI – “ensure that artificial general intelligence benefits all of humanity,”

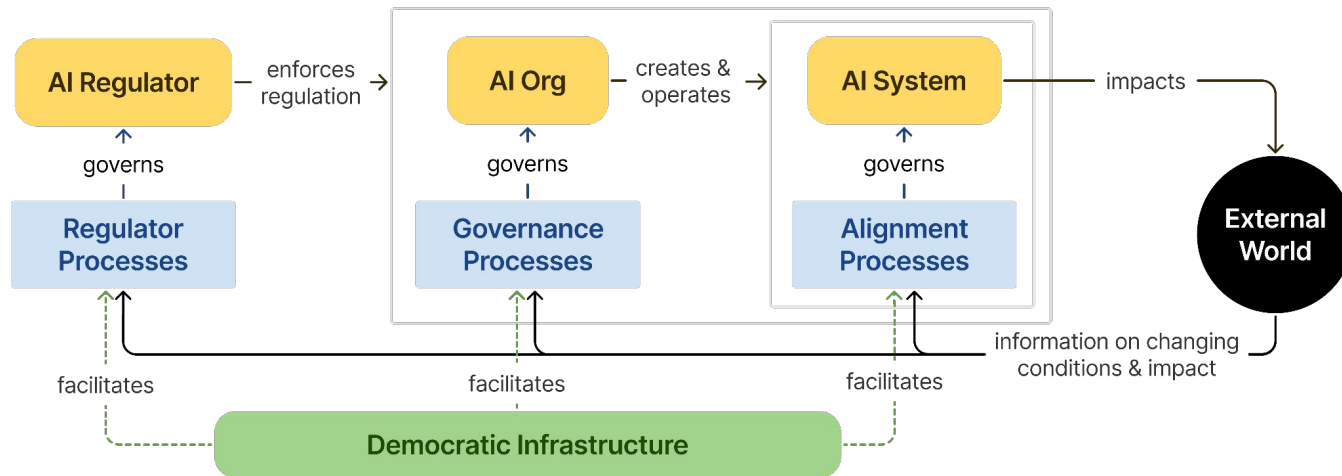
Delaware PBC directors are deemed to have satisfied their duties with respect to a balancing decision if the decision is “both informed and disinterested and not such that no person of ordinary, sound judgment would approve.”

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Capacity

Australia has some of the world's best deliberative practitioners.

new
DEMOCRACY

mosaicLAB

GAUGE
CONSULTING

...

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Precedent



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Ausgrid

Yarra
Valley
Water

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Citizen Initiated Referenda

One Nation will push for the introduction of a Citizens Initiated Referenda, enabling Australian citizens to put forward legislation or a referendum question without waiting for politicians to listen and act.



Increase public participation in decision making ^

Trust in our political leaders and institutions is incredibly low after years of blatant misuse of public funds.

Democracy should go beyond casting a vote; it should include genuine public participation in decisions that shape our lives and future, delivering better policy and outcomes and stronger, more cohesive communities.

A Public Interest Democracy Fund, administered by the Department of Parliamentary Services, will support trials of innovative programs and digital platforms to put people back at the heart of parliament.

The Greens' plan:

- Empower communities by establishing a \$10 million Public Interest Democracy Fund. This fund will support trials of innovative programs and digital platforms to increase democratic participation.
- Foster better decision-making by funding citizen juries to report back to parliament.



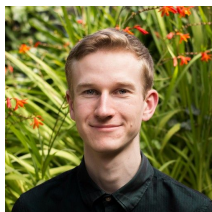
Team + collaborators



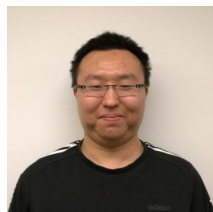
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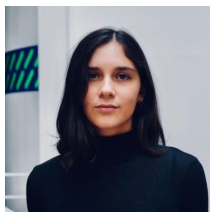
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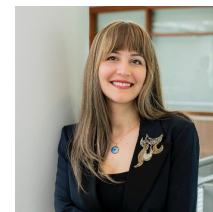
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