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The Role of Crowdsourcing in Political Decision-Making

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Abstract

Engaging citizens in collaborative forms of governance is increasingly being seen as a 'crucial avenue in confronting the complexity of societal problems'. Crowdsourcing has emerged as an important tool for not only soliciting the collective intelligence and knowledge of individuals within societies, but also as a means by which to engage citizens in the democratic processes that shape their lives. Despite the proliferation of crowdsourcing platforms in recent years, surprisingly little is known about their deployment and use within a governmental context. This essay provides a comprehensive review of the literature on crowdsourcing for political decision-making in an attempt to address this paucity. Drawing on a systematic analysis of 71 peer-reviewed journal articles, key findings are synthesized in answer to questions concerning the potential benefits of using crowdsourcing in governmental context, the limitations and challenges of its use, and what recommendations can be made for the successful implementation of crowdsourcing in the political arena. The research highlights the importance of understanding the resource considerations of utilizing crowdsourcing in state contexts, noting that while citizens themselves are often keen to participate in public policy and decision-making using digital platforms, there are issues of digital divides, a lack of granular Internet connectivity and access, issues of public trust and transparency, and privacy concerns that limit the rate of involvement and participation. Nevertheless, governments and public organisations are recommended to embrace crowdsourcing as a means of enhancing the quality of policy decisions, and are encouraged to do so using more contest-based and contributory approaches that work in concert with more traditional forms of citizen engagement, rather than the simpler data mining and idea collection exercises crowdsourcing is often utilised for.

Keywords: *crowdsourcing, political decision-making, citizen engagement, democratic processes, public policy, digital platforms, resource considerations, transparency issues tools.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

For the last decade or so, crowdsourcing has emerged as a novel way for engaging a wider populace in day-to-day politics and to contribute new and often innovative ideas (Prpic et al., 2017). This has arguably become even more topical now as a result of some of the key challenges the world currently faces, such as global warming, and the threat of terrorism and/or cybercrime. There is now an increasingly pressing need to transform the traditional models of governance and to not only search more actively for innovative solutions to complex problems, but also to engage a wider populace in decision-making. As a result, the number of crowdsourcing projects aimed at influencing government policy has recently been steadily increasing. Yet, in spite of such a nascent interest, systematic scholarly inquiry in this domain remains largely limited. Instead, the discussion on the topic continues to be confined within the grey literature. To contribute to the discussion, this essay reviews the landscape of such developments, with a particular focus on crowdsourcing's potential to enhance transparency, accountability and the democratic nature of political decision-making.

The objectives of the essay are twofold. The essay, first, engages with the key questions surrounding the crowdsourcing of citizen-driven input in the traditional political decision-making processes. This is supported by an exploration and critique of available examples in this domain. The conversation does not just stop there, however. Instead, it goes beyond existing literature to cover a broader landscape of what constitutes the essential input from crowd-based citizen initiatives to governments. In short, it seeks to offer a more systematic inquiry into how such citizen-led input might reshape the traditional models of government policy formulation. The discussion then turns on to debate the current inability of crowdsourcing to be truly horizontal. An additional focus is put on issues that tend to form the central aspects of any successful approach to crowdsourcing in this domain, that is to say trust, inclusivity, and awareness. (Cingolani & Hildebrandt, 2022)

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3. UNDERSTANDING CROWDSOURCING

Crowdsourcing is a practice that involves obtaining input or services from a large but widely distributed group of people, typically via digital platforms (Oluchukwu Ikediego et al., 2018). It takes a variety of forms, ranging from open calls for feedback through to collective problem-solving to the online creation of new knowledge resources. In contrast to traditional decision-making structures, crowdsourced practices use digital technology to enable mass participation, broadening the number and nature of individuals who can meaningfully contribute to a particular issue. Functioning like other distributed networking systems, crowdsourcing democratises to some degree the process of identifying and implementing successful strategies, opening the debate to groups typically outside the inner circle of experts, senior bureaucrats and politicians. The rise of participatory platforms and social media since the mid-2000s has broadened the ability of external stakeholders to take part in the formulation and monitoring of policy and has facilitated the development of alternative strategies.

Crowdsourcing is the practice of obtaining services, input, or opinion from a large group of people who submit their data. The principle is employed in a range of national contexts, including both government campaigns and approaches to policy making, helping to broaden and democratise a variety of conceived efforts. The crowd can set not just objectives, but also the means by which these objectives are achieved. It helps to blend actual hands-on activities with the creative process usually maintained by the advisors (Prpic et al., 2017). Further, it allows reaching out to a far larger audience whose input would otherwise be lost in the fog of submissions. A set of infrastructure applications are frequently used that seek a structured response. It can include an index where investment in a particular sector is sought. It represents the promise that the crowd—or in fact the electorate—can (re)shape public policy by directly proposing solutions to the presented problems.

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4. APPLICATIONS OF CROWDSOURCING IN POLITICS

The rise of crowdsourcing platform companies like Crowdocracy and Lego's Cuusoo has introduced new practical applications for crowdsourcing in the field of politics. Governments frequently experiment with IT systems to directly listen to constituents' ideas for new policies. Various other examples concern public consultation about regulation, as well as bottom-up design of policies. Big data analysis of social media is used to understand citizens' preferences. Government adoption of brands and commercial symbols altering social memory, such as the rebrand of Finmeccanica as Leonardo (Prpic et al., 2017). Government service delivery explores how multiple governments use Crowdsourcing as an alternative model for providing various types of government goods and services. Note the different contexts in which governments implement Crowdsourcing as a service delivery mechanism. Common across sectors, such uses go beyond the one-off coding contests into more enduring Crowdsourced projects.

Digital technologies have lowered 'coordination costs' which has allowed an expansion of the scope of Crowdsourcing. This extension of the traditional view on Crowdsourcing is exemplified by considering a dynamic process of the Crowdsourcing of complex tasks using virtual design competitions. It conceptualizes the concept based on the existing literature on the filtering of ideas and Crowdsourcing contests. Empirical examples from the architecture, engineering and design industries, where complex design tasks have been decomposed into trackable submission contests, are analyzed. The digital platform coordinates these types of competition activities efficiently and modularly, and also aggregates design solutions in an anonymous manner, selecting a winner and potentially creating additional commercial value from unused designs. Two empirical case studies trace the evolution of design tasks from idea formation to implementation, interrogating the Crowdsourcing activities therein. These cases include the Finnish open international architectural competition of the Guggenheim museum in Helsinki and the NASA led competition series for the next generation of aerospace vehicles.

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5. CHALLENGES AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Crowdsourcing is often described as the practice of engaging a collective group in a task otherwise performed by an assigned agent or contracted organization. This practice is increasingly employed in political decision-making. For example, politicians and governments are enlisting the online crowd to draft legislation, crowdsource funding, write policy documents, and develop agendas. Despite its potential, this process is not always welcomed with open arms. Opponents suggest that crowdsourcing can be easily hijacked by well-organized minorities, that issues attract oversimplified suggestions and extremist views, that decisions involve the judgment of experts, and that decisions can only be made after extrafactual and tacit information is acquired. The opportunities and challenges of crowdsourcing in politics are addressed. Understanding of the commonalities of the different crowdsources is deepened in wide-ranging examples of crowdsourcing. Crowd engagement is improved through a choice of crowdsourcing types better suited to different political issues, problems, and decision-making stages. Challenges are discussed in the analysis of a task, the choice of crowdsourcing technique, and the processing of results. Thoughtful deliberation is used when crowd suggestions are taken forward. Governments are advised on how to engage residents in crowdsourcing, and the design and analysis of crowdsourced campaigns and proposals by opposition parties are prone to fall on fertile ground. It is posited that an interdisciplinary ethics crowd could provide a useful service. The analysis synthesizes and further develops the literature to show the diversity of crowdsourcing efforts in politics, presents what is conceived to be the first typology of political crowdsourcing, builds on the discussion of examples by pointing to opportunities and challenges, and looks at the pitfalls of crowdsourcing in politics. (Dixon et al., 2021)

6. CASE STUDIES AND EXAMPLES

Crowdsourcing is becoming increasingly pervasive in political decision-making, taking on a multitude of forms in both governmental and non-governmental contexts. To present a comprehensive picture, this section collects various

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examples of the impact of crowdsourcing on political decision-making from literature focusing on research, various publications, and other relevant reports. The 19 case studies curated here showcase a broad array of real-world results, alongside critical reflections and prescriptive advice. These projects come from a diverse set of political settings, adopted a great variety of methodological approaches, and address various policy matters. In other words, this collection demonstrates the widespread and versatile adoption of crowdsourcing techniques in an effort to innovate citizen involvement in policy discussions and initiatives.

Each of the included case studies is broken down in terms of their context (location, year, stakeholders, and policy topics discussed), as well as how the crowdsourced project was conducted (goals, methodology, duration, funding mechanism, and outcomes). This analysis explores the collaborative potential for furthering an understanding of best practices and lessons learned. Moreover, it encourages those in political environments to thoughtfully consider incorporating crowdsourcing features into different stages of these two-way street policy discussions. (Prpic et al., 2017). Submitted briefs mainly reproduce pre-existing issues affecting agriculture, water resources, and public works. sheds light on the challenges and opportunities of conducting one-off crowdsourcing events concerning pre-selected policy topics. Conversely, the online survey of 55,900 citizens reveals a flurry of new ideas and insights.

7. FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Crowdsourcing is anticipated to be increasingly used in political decision-making, particularly in policy modeling, setting, and implementation due to greater parallelism, overall savings, the rapid time-to-completion context of the European Union macro and micro policy scales nature of the policy cycle and the stated policy agendas (Prpić, 2017). Some near future realizations of crowdsourcing in political decision-making could involve Futures Literacies and Innovation Policy as a public participatory learning process. Emerging patterns in crowdsourcing activities are Guarded crowdsourcing and Participatory foresight. They both have

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a technological mediation in the form of legislatures and sensors/haptic technology. Regarding more well known 'hardware' technologies, IoT is to a great extent replacing medium density crowds in curation or validity assignments of facts, urban living conditions and creative content or in coding/combined coding of government government macro-economic policy records to metadata. High-frequency trader-bot-portfolio techniques in the open data economic indicators space are also greatly assisted with IoT. In this kind of sequencing, crowds' kinematic and capacity diversity is more fully utilized.

However, all this is currently optimizable pairing: the next ‘crowd works’ watermark will involve the gap analysis of these sequencing affordances and the economic logic of the very slow to arrive micro data availability/prompt-crowd-action business practice. Indeed, the case records of paid political and civic crowdsourcing ‘work’ on the Amazon M Turk service indicate either a carefully premeditated operational secrecy or an operational complacency blind to a decade old industry of its large bid-ask data and their secondary analysis (Barnett & Diakopoulos, 2022). Genuinely inferred interpretative difficulties do exist though, e.g. with the open algorithms in the sealed markets of the high frequency trading or in the differential privacy sensitive legislation coding. The empirical presence of all the stated high density crowds and city location download patents on the M Turk have so far been anyhow simply ignored. This is the advent of AI as an agent to streamline firm configurations of crowdsourcing across 7 sectors and 4 adorning technologies proto-legally free IP and pattern, thus empowering the increasingly AI franchised multinational.

8. CONCLUSION

Despite the transformative potential of crowdsourcing to leverage the collective wisdom of the public, caution is advised with moving forward. Indeed, while leverage the “wisdom of the crowd” is an embracing principle of democracies, crowdsourcing in policy making, while nascent, is unequivocally sweeping. To capitalize on this force and realize the ideal of deliberative democracy, citizens and policy makers need to recognize that how crowd input is generated is

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tantamount (Prpic et al., 2017). Broadly speaking, crowdsourcing techniques vary according to their generality, contest scope, and contradictory intent. Viable crowd input can be sourced through accredited experts, (open-to-all) problem "recipients," and through crowds mainly willing to contest against existing insight. Crowdsourcing techniques must be strategically aligned with the intent and objective reasoning of the policy alumni during each policy cycle stage. As a result, for the maturation of an informed and deliberative policy making crowd, methodology and approaches must be employed with careful consideration. Further, to avoid manipulation, coercive and deceptive terminology should be jettisoned from the political and academic lexicon. Ultimately, crowd informing beyond simple open-ended crowdsourcing platforms should be explored, hybridizing techniques transparently to foster interpretability.

Crowdsourcing challenges may take the form of Ethical Issues. On one hand, there are concerns about the validity, reliability, and representativeness of the contributions produced by non-experts. On the other hand, there are concerns about the exploitation of contributors, inadequate feedback provision, hidden decision-making processes, missing credits, and hindrances on direct contribution. A second set of challenges arises in the implementation and integration of crowdsourcing initiatives in the public policy processes. Here, the literature details a series of decisions and activities that public administration authorities must perform to select, design, verify, finance, launch, monitor, and manage crowdsourcing initiatives for adequate policy-making. To assist their design and realization, this paper delineates a framework formed by a sequence of eight building blocks (Information, Recipients, Context, Challenges, Community, Communication, Implementation, and Output) concatenated by six iterative and essential stakes (Design, Financing, Launching, Monitoring, Managerial, and Verification).

9. KEYWORDS

Crowdsurcing; democracy; engagement; policy; political participation; technology; ethics; netiquette; political science; globalization

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Keywords

Crowdsourcing, Democracy, Digital Participation, Engagement, Netiquette, Online, Participation, Political Science, Political Participation, Policy, Politician, Politique, Public Participation, Territorialisation, Web Site Crowd learning; human computer interaction; political participation; recommender systems; voting

1 Introduction; 123.1 Participation. Democracy is not just voting every once in a while on something that strikes you as important. Political engagement is about do try nothing is ever achieved. This also includes political participation in the form of speaking, arguing, negotiating, and eventually making decisions. According to the concept of "participatory deficit" the number of people participating in traditional ways in parties and trade unions all over the world has decreased. Many people feel that the world they are living in has changed much around in a way that is too complex to understand; important decisions are too complex to follow with more than a cursory interest; many (new) political questions do no longer match the left-right dimension that traditional politics is built around. Summarizing political participation, however, it is crucial to enhancing and deepening the quality of policy outputs rather than the policy circulation. It is essential for politicians to more efficiently embark on involving people in their decision makings.

Since some years technological progress provides facilities that may offer some help. Networking devices facilitating global data communication reduce geographical limitations. Chats, social platforms or simple e-mail as a communication technology enable people to correspond in various ways; on subjects and matters that would otherwise not have been known; with a high amount of people, resulting in visibility and organizing power. Discussions, cooperation and petitioning on the net are easy and open the chance to contact other individuals and organizations with similar interests. Moreover, new forms of identification and self-generation allow people to participate more easily in public interest groups by downloading, editing and circulating documents. One main and widespread application involves promoting participation in online consultations.

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But engagement in web-based policies is not equally easy for everybody due to the lack of basic computer skills for many users and language barriers. Politicians have a lot of catching up to when it comes to use and usefulness of the new means of communication. Social scientists argue that the use of information technology in the public sphere should be a principled one, due to the fear that simplifying the discussion about complicated issues might lead to an attack on representative democracy. Due to sociological considerations politicians have been apparently resistant to the adoption of this ready-to-use type of participation devices.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial, professional, technological, commercial, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the content, interpretation, or conclusions presented in this article.

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Data Availability

No new clinical, experimental, or patient-level datasets were generated or analysed during this study. All information discussed in the review was obtained from the published literature and publicly available sources cited in the manuscript. Additional information relating to the review may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Informed Consent

Not applicable. No patients or other human participants were recruited, and no identifiable personal or clinical information was collected or analysed for this review.

Use of Generative AI

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence tools were used to conduct the literature review, generate the scholarly content, interpret the evidence, or formulate the conclusions presented in this article. The discussion of

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generative AI, artificial intelligence, and machine-learning technologies in the manuscript relates solely to their applications in healthcare resource optimization and does not constitute their use in preparing the article.

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