Creating a trusted environment for the democratic use of technology
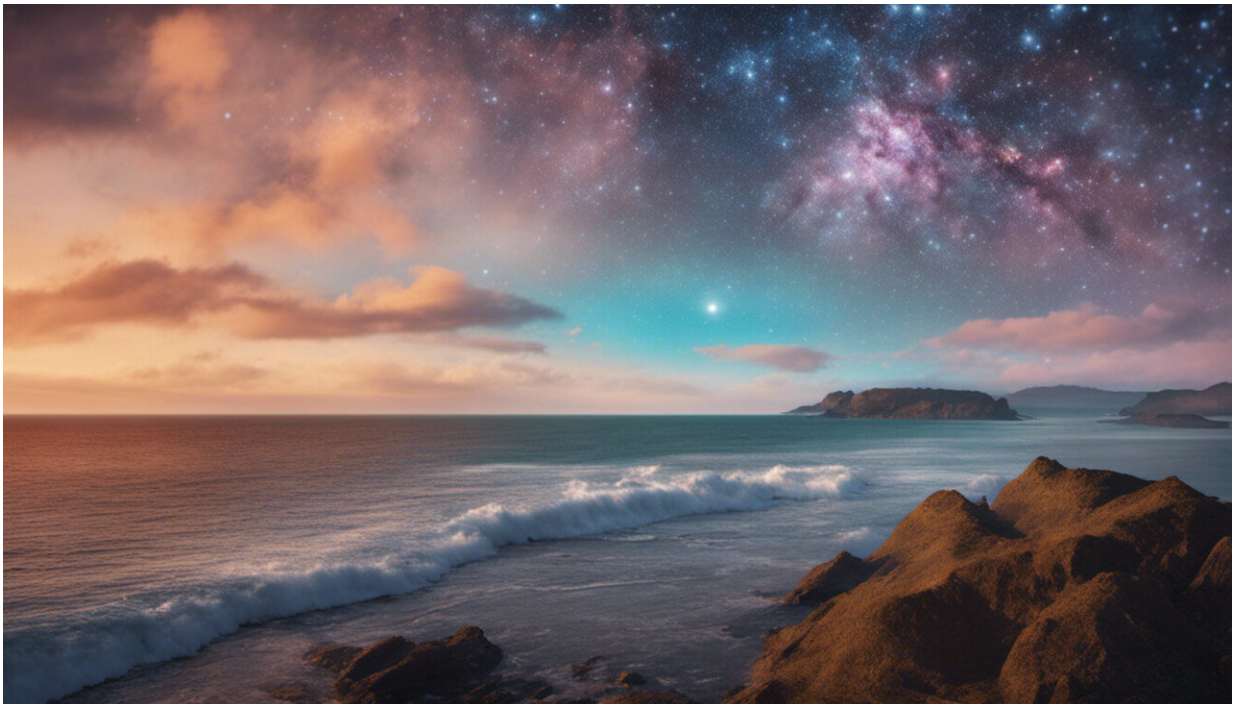
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A new report from the Oxford Technology and Elections Commission (OxTEC), convened by the Oxford Internet Institute, calls for co-ordinated action by the public and private sector to address and redress the problems around disinformation in public life today.

Co-authors of the report, Professor Phil Howard, Director of the Oxford Internet Institute (OII) and lead researcher Lisa-Maria Neudert, set out a series of recommendations aimed at securing the information infrastructure of elections and creating a trusted environment for the democratic use of technology.

The report—"Ready to Vote: Elections, Technology & Political Campaigning in the United Kingdom"—highlights areas for immediate action for policymakers, political parties, industry and civil society and also sets out short-term and long-term recommendations.

Key recommendations:

- Government—Relevant government agencies should meet regularly and establish a mechanism for the Electoral Commission to verify campaigners and ensure appropriate legislation is in place to track campaign expenditure.
- Political parties—They should develop a code of practice for the use of third-party data and provide the Electoral Commission with details of commercially purchased data and imprints disclosing information about campaigners.
- Industry—Social media platforms should create a full advertising archive freely accessible to all and provide the Electoral Commission with reports on content moderation and takedowns.
- Civil Society—External firms to conduct audits of social media companies and their practices that reflect expectations from election administrators. Identify data needs required to devise on shortcomings and risk of social networks.

Professor Philip Howard, Director of the Oxford Internet Institute (OII) and OxTEC Commissioner, said: "Technology has allowed more people to participate in political discussion than ever before and has been vital to engaging harder to reach groups. Social media is also now fully

embedded in political communication. In our new report, we set out the key challenges affecting [democracy](#) in the United Kingdom and provide recommendations on how civil society, policymakers, and social media companies can work together to address these challenges, using technology to strengthen democracy now and in the future."

Lisa-Maria Neudert, lead researcher at the OII and Commission Secretary, said: "Political parties and candidates have an online presence and digital targeting has become an indispensable tool in any politician's electoral kit, with campaigners developing increasingly sophisticated strategies every election cycle. Questions around the role of technology and democracy have emerged as an ongoing challenge for regulators in the United Kingdom and around the world. Regulators, industry and [civil society](#) must act in a coordinated way to protect democracy."

OxTEC, convened by the OII, consists of academics, researchers, technology experts and policymakers, and was established to explore how to safeguard democracy from the potentially disruptive influences of modern technology.

More information: Ready to Vote: Elections, Technology and Political Campaigning in the United Kingdom. oxtec.oii.ox.ac.uk/publication/ready-to-vote/

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