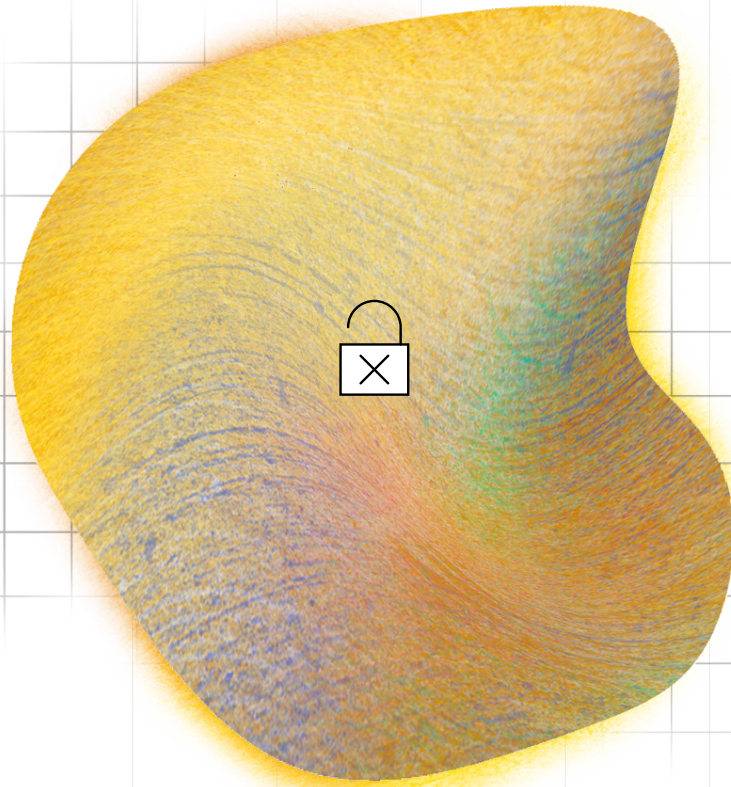


**upgrade
democracy**

Policy Brief



Digital Discourses and the Democratic Public Sphere 2035

How Politics Today Can Shape Tomorrow

Charlotte Freihse and Kai Unzicker

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Looking Ahead: From Reactive to Proactive Policy-Making

Digital Discourses and the Democratic Public Sphere

Democracies around the world are under pressure, and Germany is no exception. Attacks on liberal democracy and its values come both from within, with extremist and populist actors seeking power and influence, and from abroad, with autocratic states competing for regional and global hegemony. Central to these attacks is the battle for public opinion and the overall societal mood. Among other tactics, disinformation is deliberately used to inflame emotions, drive polarisation, and undermine trust in politics, the media, and democratic systems.

In the era of social media and at a time when texts, images, and videos can be convincingly generated or manipulated by artificial intelligence, the value of the democratic public sphere for the survival of democracy becomes evident. Resilient democracies need a discursive space that provides reliable and trustworthy information.

Democracy thrives on the competition between politicians and parties with differing values and interests to find the best solutions, and on citizens' ability to form opinions confidently and based on facts. It also depends on journalists acting as corrective and enlightening forces, capable of critically monitoring governments and questioning political decisions. Without such a public sphere where civilised debates can take place, and without media that provides reliable information, a vibrant democracy has little chance of future viability. But how do we ensure that the diverse possibilities of digital technologies and communication contribute to strengthening discourse rather than leading to polarisation?

Digital Discourses and the Democratic Public Sphere

We live in a time of rapid change and constant transformation – it takes effort to grasp the present and keep pace. There are hardly enough opportunities to take a forward-looking view into the future. Based on our observations, this also applies to decision-makers in politics and society, who are too often occupied by dealing with the consequences of past and present problems rather than addressing future challenges. Digitalisation is already a disruptive factor today. It changes how we live, how we communicate with each other, how we obtain information, and how we form opinions. It changes our public sphere and our public discourse – both of which are central components of the democracy in which we live. We must adapt to these conditions both as individuals in our daily lives and in how we conduct politics and political discourse in alignment with these new realities. One way to explore the future and make these adjustments is strategic foresight, a structured method guided by experts.

Such a process is helpful to enable a forward-looking perspective regarding the current policy-making around digital technologies and democracy. Driven by rapid change, political decision-makers often find themselves merely reacting to the challenges posed by digital-

isation. Proactively shaping processes or recognising and seizing opportunities early on, unfortunately, happens all too rarely. With the process we initiated, we aim to contribute to counteracting this tendency. For only those who think about possible futures today can actively shape the next 10 to 15 years.

With an interdisciplinary group from the fields of “Technology,” “Media,” “Politics,” “Research,” and “Civil Society,” we engaged in a thought experiment and explored how digital technologies might change the democratic public sphere in the next 10 to 15 years. The report we published alongside this policy brief documents our collective process in detail. In contrast, this policy brief presents our reflections on the results in light of possible policy options.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to our experts Carolin von Bredow (Responsible Technology Hub), Christian Mihr (Reporters Without Borders), Gerret von Nordheim (DER SPIEGEL), Hannah Bergmann (DigitalService), Henriette Litta (Open Knowledge Foundation), Iwan Ittermann (plista), Katharina Bonnenfant (Federal Foreign Office), Lisa Hollenbach (Press and Information Office of the Federal Government), Philip Husemann (JoinPolitics), Philipp Lorenz-Spreen (Max Planck Institute for Human Development), Thorsten Thiel (University of Erfurt) and Olaya Argüeso Pérez (CORRECTIV), as well as our colleague Cathleen Berger (Bertelsmann Foundation). We also extend our thanks to Johannes Gabriel and Marcel Hadeed from Foresight Intelligence, who guided us through this complex process.

Three Scenarios as a Reflection on the Future

In our extensive foresight process, we, along with twelve experts, dared a look into the future. Over six months, we jointly developed three robust future scenarios on the topic of “Discourses and Democratic Public Sphere 2035” Central to this process were questions such as:

- **How might digitalisation change democratic processes?**
- **Where might new opportunities for participation arise? And where might power dynamics shift?**
- **How could digital technologies alter the democratic public sphere and opinion formation?**
- **How can technological developments be actively shaped?**

Thinking and Reflecting Differently About the Future

The scenarios we developed do not claim to be precise predictions; rather, they represent just a selection of theoretically countless possible futures. Therefore, the scenarios are not necessarily the most likely outcomes. In their formulation, two factors were particularly important: first, whether they are realistic and logically consistent within themselves, and second, whether the selected scenarios differ as much as possible from each other to broadly represent the spectrum of conceivable future alternatives. Ultimately, we also aimed to highlight unexpected and surprising development paths, deliberately departing from well-trodden paths. Thus, the scenarios serve to systematically explore the range of possible futures and derive insights and implications for the present. A more detailed explanation of the method and process can be found in the comprehensive final report of our foresight process.

The purpose of engaging with scenarios is not to convince others that the future will unfold exactly as described. Rather, it serves as an exercise to detach from current conditions and assumptions, to allow oneself to be challenged, and thereby become aware of path dependencies, options for action and necessary actions, as well as of goals and aspirations.

Below, we present the three scenarios, each describing different constellations of democracy, technology, and the public sphere (a more detailed presentation of the scenarios can also be found in the final report). In a brief concluding chapter, we then present the insights and conclusions that we, as a foundation, have drawn from this process.

1 | Deliberative Renaissance: Digitalisation and Eco-Social Sustainability Bring About a Discursive Golden Age

Summary: In this scenario, immigration and educational reform lead to high levels of digital and media literacy in German society. Simultaneously, the successful application of artificial intelligence (AI) drives an economic boom, resulting in increased leisure time for workers and, consequently, greater civic engagement. Journalism has fully embraced the digital age, with new offerings widely consumed. Digital discourse spaces are well-regulated and promote dialogue. As a result, digital discourses are diverse, constructive, civilised, and nuanced.

How It Came to Be: In the near future, the German government actively shapes key societal building blocks. Due to the escalating shortage of skilled workers, it implements fundamental reforms in migration policy, benefiting from the influx of people with technical expertise. Overall, the demographic shift and labour shortages lead to a 180-degree turn towards greater openness in migration policy.

Intense pressure results in comprehensive reforms in the education system: the training of teachers is standardised and reformed; bureaucracy is reduced to attract foreign professionals and career changers; and AI is strategically employed to act as a personalised instructor and to overcome language barriers. These reforms are accompanied by a realignment of school education – shifting away from rote learning towards skills for responsible citizenship, such as digital and media literacy and (self-)critical reflection. The combined interests of civil society and federal and state governments eventually overcome the inertia of the slow-moving education system.

Moreover, the German government successfully and proactively implements the Digital Services Act (DSA), requiring platforms to incorporate social and deliberative optimisation goals into their ranking algorithms, alongside monetary ones, and to make the goal optimisation transparent. New regulations on interoperability strengthen competition, allowing users to switch between platforms easily, retaining their reach and content.

AI also transforms journalism: the news business becomes largely automated and personalised. Journalists can now focus on investigative research, opinion pieces, and content curation. On the one hand, lower production costs and lucrative deals with AI companies enable publishing houses to offer their subscriptions more affordably. On the other hand, the first cross-publisher subscription models gain significant market share. These developments trigger a continuous evolution of intermediaries' business models, leading to differentiation along topics and regions, as well as across media (from newspapers to TikTok). In this way, high-quality journalism reaches a larger portion of the population, who are also willing to pay for these media. Similarly, digital discourses are transformed by AI, which allows for high-quality and comprehensive moderation of content, such as on social media, resulting in less hate speech online. The combination of migration, education, and AI integration increasingly turns Germany into a successful technology hub.

In the late 2020s, the German economy undergoes a fundamental eco-social transformation. This is sparked by a scandal: in 2027, it is revealed that 20 members of parliament from one of the governing parties attempted to accept money from a mobility company in exchange for significantly stalling CO2 price development in the EU. This leads to several politicians resigning and ultimately to new elections in the autumn of 2027. A young, progressive electoral alliance, advocating for eco-social sustainability, attracts many voters, particularly young people, who turn out in record numbers. A generational and ideological shift also becomes evident in the business world. Increasingly, entrepreneurial families are aligning their companies and private resources towards greater eco-social sustainability, engaging in positive competition.

The 2029 federal election is shaped by this entrepreneurial rethinking, as well as by new records of drought and heat in the previous years: the progressive electoral alliance becomes the second strongest force and gains a role in government. The economic restructuring also has an impact on the labour market: by 2030, the coupling of productivity and working hours results in full-time positions requiring only 30 hours per week. People have more time for leisure, culture, volunteering, and civic engagement.

The year 2030 is celebrated by some as the “Renaissance of Deliberative Democracy,” as social and political discourse - both online and offline - becomes inclusive, respectful, and constructive. The availability of high-quality media, successful educational reforms, technological progress, and effective digital regulation - particularly of optimisation algorithms - lay the foundations for strong, inclusive participation. This is supported by a public broadcasting system that is digitally visible, present, and popular.

In the first half of the 2030s, these positive social developments continue: Germany has successfully become an integration miracle - thanks in part to AI. The economy is more sustainable and dynamic. People enjoy both monetary and time wealth, which they use for civic or political engagement - for example, in one of over 100 citizen councils or well-moderated digital discourse spaces. By 2035, the digital space is effectively and internationally regulated.

The Scenario in 2035: Comprehensive and effective AI moderation of digital discourse spaces and new optimisation goals for algorithms make online debates factual and constructive. High-quality journalism has developed new business models with affordable, cross-publisher subscription plans, and citizens have access to high-quality information. Many people feel a sense of temporal and monetary well-being and are civically engaged. Overall, trust in democratic institutions is high, as key issues such as “digitalisation,” “education,” and “migration” have been successfully addressed. Various formats are widely used for political participation

2 – The viral state – like and subscribe to our narrative! Digital Discourses and Participation under a Right-Wing Populist Government

Summary: In this scenario, fear of migration drives the political discourse to the right. Increasing numbers of citizens turn away from traditional media and instead rely on social media for information. This leads to a distorted perception of reality, fuels fear and anger, and brings the first right-wing populist government to power. This government uses its mandate to reshape the media landscape and to actively and self-servingly regulate digital discourse spaces. As a result, digital discourses become negatively and extremely distorted, uncivilised, and partially state-controlled. With increasingly divergent perceptions of reality, it becomes difficult to speak of an informed, and thus democratic, public.

How It Came to Be: The traffic light coalition loses its majority following a failed vote of confidence in 2024. A Jamaica coalition forms the interim government, implementing a conservative fiscal policy, for instance with more funding for internal security and less for culture. The public broadcasting fee is reduced. Against the backdrop of rising refugee numbers, migration remains a dominant political issue. In the 2025 federal election, the Jamaica coalition stays in power, and the AfD receives a “relatively moderate” 15%. However, the migration issue drives the political discourse further to the right.

The debate escalates following a violent incident involving refugees on New Year’s Eve 2025/26, which the police only manage to control by early morning. The AfD skilfully capitalises on this event. Especially in the digital space, a new generation of identitarian influencers spread discriminatory and right-wing populist narratives unfiltered, which rapidly gain popularity.

This is exacerbated by loopholes in the EU Digital Services Act, allowing algorithms to continue functioning based on attention-driven metrics. Consequently, users increasingly see only a narrow, interest-tailored slice of the broader picture. The increasing “TikTokisation” of political information further fragments digital realities. Digital disinformation campaigns and viral content/videos reinforce the general impression that no one is safe in the German public. The public broadcasting system cannot match the attention-driven narrative with its factual content and continues to lose reach. As fear, anger, and hatred spread, the political discourse shifts further to the extreme. From then on, the AfD consistently polls just below 35%.

This gives the AfD significant momentum for the 2029 federal election, where it clearly emerges as the strongest party and subsequently leads the governing coalition.

In the following year, the public broadcasting system faces a deep crisis: fact-checking content creators reveal that several regional broadcasters have unknowingly disseminated deepfake videos and AI-“hallucinated” content. In response to this “loss of trust,” AfD-led federal states annul the broadcasting contracts with their regional public broadcasters. The new federal government also responds: the Federal Ministry for Information and Citizen Interests begins developing a secure digital ecosystem with access to news and social media

without fake news. By April 2031, a portal is introduced for citizens with a German passport, where they can apply for state services and watch the daily information address from the Minister. An integrated social network also promotes the reach of state narratives, while allegedly anti-government propaganda and critical voices are suppressed. While some European countries criticise Germany, others see the German path as a model. As a result, digital governance at the EU level is blocked. Overall, the AfD government creates a controlled digital ecosystem that strengthens the government's control over information.

At the same time, increased economic cooperation with Russia and China leads to strong economic growth in Germany and a revival of the German technology sector. The combination of discourse dominance and economic growth secures the AfD an absolute majority in the 2033 federal election. This stable right-wing populist majority is opposed by an increasingly marginalised civil society, which is barely visible in public discourse. It operates only locally, where small liberal strongholds emerge. However, there is no broad-based significant opposition to changes in migration and climate policy. Citizens get their information almost exclusively from social media and the perceived safe digital portal. Overall, the government's control over discourse aligns more and more citizens with its views.

The Scenario in 2035: Germany is governed by a right-wing populist majority. The political culture is characterised by a strongly anti-European stance. Although Germany is economically prosperous, this prosperity feels fragile to many, leading to a negative assessment of their living conditions. This fear of decline is actively fuelled by the state, which has taken on an active role in moderating digital discourses. Through the self-developed portal with its integrated social media platform, the government dominates narratives. The applied sorting algorithm and the incentive system for discourse participants mean that critical voices barely find any audience online. Consequently, political information is biased and of low quality, and independent journalism hardly exists. As a result, there is a weak and ineffective civil society, which is at best locally active.

3 The Smart People's Home: Digital State Paternalism Shapes Discourse and Engagement in an Individualised and Digital Society

Summary: This scenario depicts a successful digitalisation of public administration in Germany, creating a functional digital ecosystem for handling administrative matters. This central platform is gradually expanded to include content from public broadcasting services and independent journalists. Moreover, it transforms into a platform for participation and discussion, giving the state central digital authority over narratives. Political debate is characterised by relative disinterest among large sections of the population, a rather paternalistic moderation of digital discourse by the state, and limited diversity of participants. While the democratic public has access to high-quality information, there is little interest in major political debates.

How it came to be: As early as 2024, the expectation of a recession leads the German government to comprehensively address the issue of digitalisation. The focus is on three areas, strengthened by a stimulus package and legislative measures: investment in the German digital economy, provision of effective basic services such as high-speed connectivity and digital identification, and the use of democracy- and competition-enhancing regulation. This includes enforcing interoperability between platforms and developing a democracy-promoting AI moderation system.

From 2026, digitalisation becomes tangible for citizens through the introduction of the "Germany App". With the help of AI, state services are provided in a simplified manner: applications are pre-filled and only need approval. A digital ecosystem forms around the app, as its source code is publicly accessible, allowing private companies to develop their own services based on it.

However, the app is not limited to state services. The public broadcasting service's information offering also finds a place within it, with content organised by an optimisation algorithm to foster dialogue. Additionally, independent journalists can make their content available and are directly paid based on the number of clicks – this gradually weakens traditional journalistic business models. Social media does not completely lose significance but becomes more integrated into the state app through mandated interoperability. For users, this creates a social media ecosystem where they can easily move between and utilise different services and platforms. Providers find integration into the state app economically attractive. AI moderation ensures that discourse within the ecosystem remains constructive and reflective. The combination of administrative services and political discourse is highly popular, and by the end of 2029, the government reports 45 million daily active users. Critics, however, point out that the fourth estate (media) is thereby restricted.

The digital stimulus programme also strengthens the economy and leads to prosperity. The state and society are digitalising at an accelerating pace. The first Europe-wide "Digital Champions" significantly contribute to the burgeoning economic growth, particularly in areas such as "AI, cybersecurity, and virtual reality". Economic prosperity and the comprehensive state services provided through the app ensure high levels of public satisfaction.

In 2032, the Germany App takes another step forward: it is now possible to participate in local political decisions through the app – for instance, by voting on where a bus route should go or what a street should be named. Citizens can make these decisions quickly and easily.

Algorithm regulation increasingly turns the state into the gatekeeper of a pragmatic and sober debate. Topics that were previously hotly contested now reach a consensus: for example, migration is considered solely in terms of its supposed economic benefits and is otherwise tightly controlled. With everyone seemingly doing well economically and the state providing the desired services, right-wing populism loses its appeal. Citizens lose interest in overarching societal questions and are content to be involved in small-scale matters. Social life takes place mostly in AI-moderated discourse spaces and at home. This phenomenon is described as “Smart Hygge” and reinforces the decline of civic engagement. Overall, an apathetic and individualised civil society emerges, making way for a paternalistic state.

The scenario in 2035: There is high, but in some parts, naive trust in democratic institutions. People’s living conditions are perceived positively because Germany is economically prosperous. People enjoy spending time in digital discourse spaces. The state offers its own alternatives to Facebook, X, and other social media, promoting sober discourse without hate or agitation. Citizens have access to high-quality information, even though traditional, media-driven journalism no longer has a wide reach. However, interest is limited. Citizens rarely discuss major political issues but participate locally. As a result, civil society operates within a very local and limited framework and remains weak.

What the Future Scenarios Teach Us About the Present

As mentioned at the outset, engaging with exploratory scenarios serves as a starting point for systematically reflecting on what desirable conditions should be achieved in the future, what developments should be avoided, and how path dependencies can either continue or be broken. Based on this reflection, options and necessities for action can be identified and formulated. Depending on the organisation, field of action, or context, different conclusions can be drawn from the same scenarios.

Therefore, the following recommendations for action are neither exhaustive nor inevitable; they reflect our specific understanding as the commissioning party, derived from the process in collaboration with the expert group. In further workshops we aim to conduct in other organisations, different results will likely emerge.

Normative Evaluation Framework: Inclusive, Respectful, Open, and Transparent Public Sphere

The three scenarios are, in principle, value-neutral descriptions. To arrive at recommendations for action, they had to be considered within a normative evaluation framework. For this purpose, we established four criteria:

First, public discourse should be inclusive and pluralistic. This means that, in principle, anyone who wishes to participate in the discourse can do so, and political and societal debates do not run parallel and disconnected but are closely intertwined and interwoven. Secondly, interactions should be respectful and tolerant despite all controversies and conflicts. This allows for reasonable engagement across conflict lines. Thirdly, information on political and societal fundamental issues should be openly accessible and easy to understand. Efforts should be made to ensure that all citizens are, in principle, able to sufficiently inform themselves about political processes and form opinions. Lastly, the normatively desirable public sphere should be characterised by the fact that interests or influences are communicated transparently, so that manipulations or distortions can be identified and, if necessary, prevented.

Opportunities and Risks in the Three Scenarios

The scenarios depict three very different developments leading up to the year 2035 and the conditions at that time. Consequently, the nature of digital discourse and the democratic public sphere varies significantly in each scenario, along with the opportunities and risks they entail.

In the first scenario, “Deliberative Renaissance,” immigration and education reform lead to high digital and media literacy within society. Simultaneously, the successful application of artificial intelligence drives economic growth, resulting in increased time wealth for workers, which translates into more civic engagement. Journalism has adapted to the digital age,

and its new offerings are widely consumed. Digital discourse spaces are well-regulated and promote dialogue. As a result, discourse in these spaces is diverse, constructive, civilised, and nuanced.

In the second scenario, “Viral State,” fear of migration pushes political discourse to the right. Increasingly, citizens turn away from traditional media and instead rely on social media for information. This distorts perceptions of reality, fuels fear and anger, and enables the first right-wing populist government to win an election. This government uses its mandate to reshape the media landscape and to actively and selfishly regulate digital discourse spaces. Digital discourses become distorted towards negativity and extremes, uncivilised, and partially state-controlled. As perceptions of reality increasingly diverge, it becomes difficult to speak of an informed, and consequently, a democratic public sphere.

The third scenario, “Smart People’s Home,” shows a successful digitalisation of public administration, creating a functional digital ecosystem for handling administrative matters. This central platform is gradually expanded to include content from public broadcasting services and independent journalists. With the expansion to include local participation opportunities and the transformation into a platform for participation and discussion, the state gains comprehensive digital authority over narratives. Digital discourses are characterised by a relative disinterest among large sections of the population, a rather paternalistic moderation of digital discourse by the state, and limited diversity of participants. The democratic public is well-informed but shows little interest in major political debates.

Four Key Policy Directions for the Future

Given the different opportunities and risks in plausible future scenarios, the question arises: what can politics do today to proactively and purposefully shape this open future, without the fear that the chosen strategy will later prove useless or, worse, counterproductive? By examining the three scenarios through the lens of the previously outlined normative evaluation framework, we can derive the following four areas for action. These stand out precisely because they, if addressed today, will likely prove helpful and beneficial in the future, regardless of which scenario unfolds. We refer to these areas as “key policy directions” – promising paths to pursue for positively shaping the future and avoiding dead ends or regressive developments.

1— Create Stronger Incentives for Civic Engagement in Democracy

In all three scenarios, an active civil society, supported by a broad majority of the population, plays a crucial role. In the first scenario, “Deliberative Renaissance,” it is a guarantor of a pluralistic society and a vibrant democracy. The other two scenarios illustrate how much democracy suffers when civil society and civic engagement wither. Both the promotion of individual engagement and the maintenance and expansion of supportive frameworks and structures are essential for the flourishing of democracy. These framework and structures should already be built or expanded today. In addition to the forms of engagement already recognised, our scenarios also indicate that it is necessary to provide stronger (political) support for engagement in democracy and constructive public discourse. This includes, for

example, determining in what contexts political activity is permissible for non-profit organisations. Without the structures and organisations that offer places and opportunities for engagement, it may become more challenging in the future to create attractive incentives for such engagement.

2— Introduce Participatory Regulation of Digital Discourse

Regulatory interventions in digital discourse, especially concerning content moderation, prove to be crucial factors for the quality and orientation of the democratic public sphere. On one hand, the state has a particular responsibility to protect its citizens on digital platforms, to combat hate and incitement, and to limit the spread of disinformation. On the other hand, these interventions always carry the risk of enabling the state to excessively infringe on citizens' freedoms and potentially misuse these powers. One way to prevent both is to make the regulation of digital discourse more participatory. This means not leaving it solely to the goodwill of platforms nor placing it entirely in the hands of the state. Through a deliberately participatory approach, broad segments of society would become aware of the importance of moderation, its rules, and its infrastructure, and actively participate in developing policy options.

Such an approach could strengthen discourse against state paternalism (as in "Smart People's Home") and against partisan takeover of digital discourse spaces (as in "Viral State"), while also promoting plurality (as in "Deliberative Renaissance").

3— Establish an Independent Oversight Body for Digital Space Regulation Initiatives

The previous suggestion for participatory regulation of digital discourses focuses mostly on the necessary normative discussions about how content moderation is conducted in digital contexts. However, there remains a need to ensure that the existing legal regulations are reliably enforced by digital communication service providers and platforms. Here too, a democratic benefit could be realised if this oversight is not carried out solely by state authorities. Instead, mechanisms should be developed to systematically and equally involve civil society in monitoring compliance with the Digital Services Act (DSA). A long-term goal could be the establishment of a multi-stakeholder approach to developing the standards to be assessed, ensuring systematic and equal participation of civil society. This could help clarifying technical aspects of regulating discourse spaces and overseeing the implementation of the DSA, including its risk assessments. Involving civil society in the development of regulation for digital discourse spaces – and specifically their optimisation algorithms – would positively impact all described scenarios: it could prevent state appropriation of regulation for self-interest (as in "Smart People's Home"). It could also counteract the coarsening of digital discourse and the heating up of the political climate (as in "Viral State"). Lastly, it could promote healthy and diverse digital exchanges (as in "Deliberative Renaissance").

4 — Ensure Sustainable Funding Models for Journalism in the Digital Age

It has become clear in all scenarios that reliable and well-resourced journalism is essential for both the quality of the digital public sphere and democracy itself. At the same time, many journalistic offerings already face significant economic challenges today. Furthermore, in the future, AI-based services will increasingly use journalistic content as a training base while also providing more and more information services themselves. Therefore, an interesting option could be to link the funding of journalism with the use of AI. One possibility for this could be to collectively regulate the marketing of journalistic texts and archives. European journalism associations could take up the issue, and the European Commission could – building on the forthcoming AI Act and the EU Data Act – aim to create an “EU Data Commons.”

Such a Data Commons would be effective in all scenarios. It would support and economically secure the penetration of the digital domain by traditional media. In the “Deliberative Renaissance” scenario, such a remuneration system would enable the affordable – and therefore widely accessible – offering of news subscriptions. In the “Viral State” and “Smart People’s Home” scenarios, a financially strong fourth estate could counteract the state’s takeover of digital discourse spaces (paternalism on one hand, and right-wing populism on the other). At the same time, the Data Commons aligns with the ambition for a unified digital ecosystem, as presented in the “Smart People’s Home” and “Deliberative Renaissance” scenarios.

Conclusion

The actions outlined above are the result of a comprehensive analysis and a structured group process. These options do not claim to be exhaustive. Rather, they invite readers to develop further design options, particularly from the perspective of other relevant collective actors. The goal is to proactively and purposefully shape the uncertain realm of possibilities, systematically considering alternative developments.

At its core, this document aims to encourage a deep engagement with the future. It focuses on reflecting on one's own organisation and perspective to develop innovative design options. The options we have outlined serve as examples, and there are undoubtedly numerous other approaches to making future discourses inclusive, plural, respectful, open, and transparent. This is especially relevant with regard to the distorting and organising rules and algorithms.

Regardless of the number and nature of the options for action, it remains crucial that relevant actors engage with the future. The risks outlined above can only be avoided in the future if actions are taken today, even if these risks do not yet appear imminent. The same applies to the many opportunities that technological developments can offer. These opportunities should be used responsibly, with a focus on their benefits for society and democracy.

Moreover, it is essential that all relevant actors actively participate in shaping the future. This requires not only a forward-thinking mindset but also a willingness to continuously address new developments and challenges. Only through collective engagement and a cooperative approach can we ensure that the future is shaped in a more inclusive, fair, and sustainable manner.

Ultimately, these options for action are intended to serve as a source of inspiration and motivate thinking beyond conventional boundaries. They should encourage the development of innovative solutions that meet the diverse demands and challenges of our time. In a world that is constantly changing, it is essential that we remain flexible and adaptable to make the most of the opportunities that arise.

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