



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
DEPARTMENT OF PARLIAMENTARY SERVICES



Digital tools for constituent engagement by parliamentarians – promises and pitfalls

Dr Tessa Satherley, Senior Researcher, Australian Parliamentary Library
9 March – PPSN Conference 2023



Introducing “civtech”

This research was undertaken during a visit to the United States in Sept-Oct 2019, funded by the APS6-EL1 Scholarship program of the then Department of Industry, Innovation and Science.

The purpose was to interview experts on **“civtech” = civic technologies = digital technologies for civic participation and citizen engagement.**

Some focus on enabling grassroots political participation. Some help government listen and interact better with citizens.



- Today, focus on sharing two examples of “parliamentary” civtech in action



- And four lessons about what can go wrong



Example 1: POPVOX

The screenshot shows the POPVOX website interface. At the top left is the POPVOX logo. To its right is a search bar with the text "Search..." and a magnifying glass icon. Further right is a "Log in" link. Below the navigation is a large hero image of a diverse group of people smiling and talking. Overlaid on this image is the text "GIVING YOU A VOICE ON THE ISSUES THAT IMPACT YOUR WORLD" and a "GET STARTED" button. Below the hero image are three columns, each with an icon, a title, a list of bullet points, and a call-to-action button.

POPVOX Search... Log in

GIVING YOU A VOICE ON THE ISSUES THAT IMPACT YOUR WORLD

GET STARTED

WE THE PEOPLE

- Follow lawmakers and organizations
- Get updates the way you want to receive them
- Weigh in on issues that matter

Sign up »

LAWMAKERS AND STAFF

- Engage with real constituents - and know they will see your posts
- Find organization positions and build support for your priorities

LegiDash

ORGANIZATIONS

- Post your position on pending legislation
- Engage your network and show lawmakers support from real people

Register »

NAVIGATION

- Dashboard
- Lawmakers
- Organizations
- Legislation
- Hubs
- Search
- About

Federal Overview



Feb 28, 2023

On Tuesday, the House will meet at 10:00 a.m. for morning hour and noon for legislative business. First votes expected: 1:30 p.m. Last votes expected: 4:45 p.m.

Legislation Pursuant to a Rule:

- H.J. Res. 30 Providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Department of Labor relating to "Prudence and Loyalty in Selecting Plan Investments and Exercising Shareholder Rights" (Closed Rule) (Sponsored by Rep. Barr / Education and the Workforce Committee)
- Begin consideration of H.R. 347 REIN IN Act (Structured Rule) (Sponsored by Rep. Stefanik / Oversight and Accountability Committee)
The Rule provides for one hour of general debate and makes in order the following amendments (descriptions and text can be found [here](#)).

Featured Bills

New Bills

Recent Activity



Fair Tax Time Radio

Endorsed

5 months ago

H.R. 25 To promote freedom, fairness, and economic opportunity by repealing the income tax and other taxes, abolishing the Internal Revenue Service, and enacting a national sales tax to be administered primarily by the States.

I'd like to know why my congressman likes the current corrupt, inefficient, weaponized, tax code over the FairTax HR 25. I can't get an answer, a meeting, or anything from this supposed voice of the people. It makes no sense except that he is profiting from the current code. Power and greed!!

♥ Like (2)

◀ Share



American Medical Association

Endorsed

6 months ago

H.R. 3173 To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to establish requirements with respect to the use of prior authorization under Medicare Advantage plans, and for other purposes.

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I write in strong support of H.R. 3173, the "Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act of 2022."

READ FULL LETTER:

https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.popvox.com/submitted/org/position_statement/2022-9-13+Letter+to+Pelosi+McCarthy+re+HR+3173+Improving+Seniors+Timely+Access+to+Care+v4.pdf

Federal Lawmakers

NAVIGATION

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Search Lawmakers



Rep. Alma Adams

[D, NC-12]

Follow



Rep. Robert Aderholt

[R, AL-4]

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Rep. Pete Aguilar

[D, CA-31]

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Rep. Mark Alford

[R, MO-4]

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Rep. Rick Allen

[R, GA-12]

Follow




Rep. Colin Allred

[D, TX-32]

Follow



Example 2: eRegulations platform

ATF eRegulations | 27 CFR Part 555 Regulations About  ATF

☰ ☰ 🔍 ⏪ § 555.78 ⏩ Comparing: 5/31/2019 to 12/26/2019 Help ⏩

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- § 555.82 Provisions of part 200 made applicable.
- § 555.83 Operations by licensees or permittees after notice of

⏪ Previous - 555.77 Next - 555.79 ⏩

§ 555.78 Representation at a hearing.

An applicant, licensee, or permittee may *represent himself*, or be represented by an attorney, a certified public accountant, or any other ~~person recognized~~ *person, specifically designated in a duly executed power of attorney that shall be filed in the proceeding by the applicant, licensee, or permittee. The applicant, licensee, or permittee shall file waivers, if applicable, under the Privacy Act of 1974 and 26 U.S.C. 6103(c) (confidentiality and disclosure of returns and return information). The Director of Industry Operations may be represented in proceedings under §§ 555.73 and 555.75 by an attorney in the Office of Chief Counsel who is authorized to practice before the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives execute and file motions, briefs and other papers in the proceeding, on behalf of the Director of Industry Operations, in the attorney's own name as provided in 31 CFR*



☰ ☰ 🔍 ⬅

Subpart B | § 555.11 Effective 12/26/2019 to present. ?

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incompetency, condition, or disease:

1. Is a danger to himself or to others; or
2. Lacks the mental capacity to contract or manage his own affairs.

b. The term will include—

1. A finding of insanity by a court in a criminal case; and
2. Those persons found incompetent to stand trial or found not guilty by reason of lack of mental responsibility by any court or pursuant to articles 50a and 76b of the Uniform Code of Military Justice,

Defined Term

Person.
Any individual, corporation, company, association, firm, partnership, society, or joint stock company.

§ 555.11

34 Related documents

2 Rulings

2 Open Letters

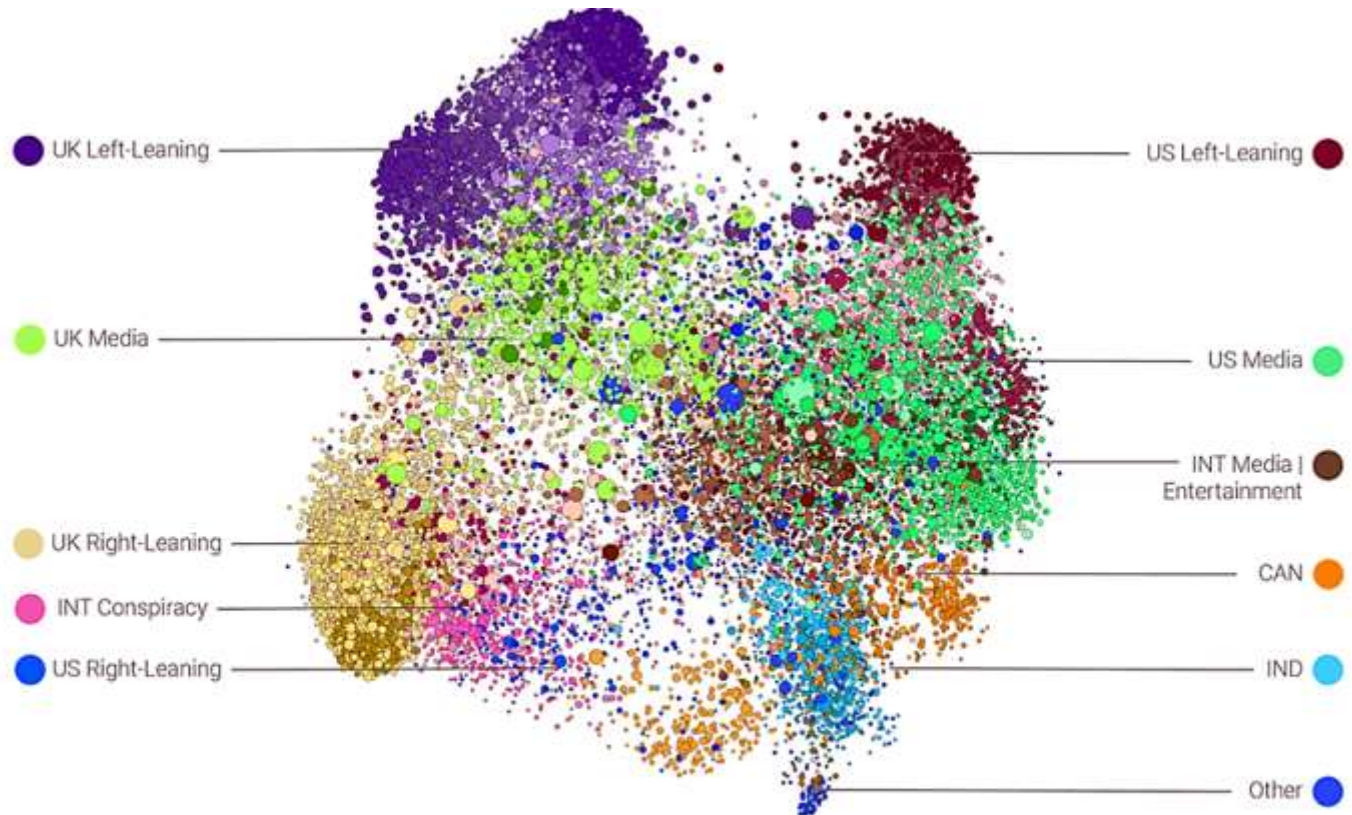
5 Newsletters

Beyond the interface...

Artificial
intelligence

Natural
language
processing

Sentiment
analysis



Grapika map of the global COVID-19 vaccine conversation on Twitter (Dec. 2020). This map is seeded on general vaccine hashtags like #Covid19vaccine, #PfizerVaccine, and #Moderna, and captured the vaccine conversation on a global scale.



Forbes

FORBES > INNOVATION > AI

Employing Sentiment Analytics To Address Citizens' Problems

Naveen Joshi Former Contributor

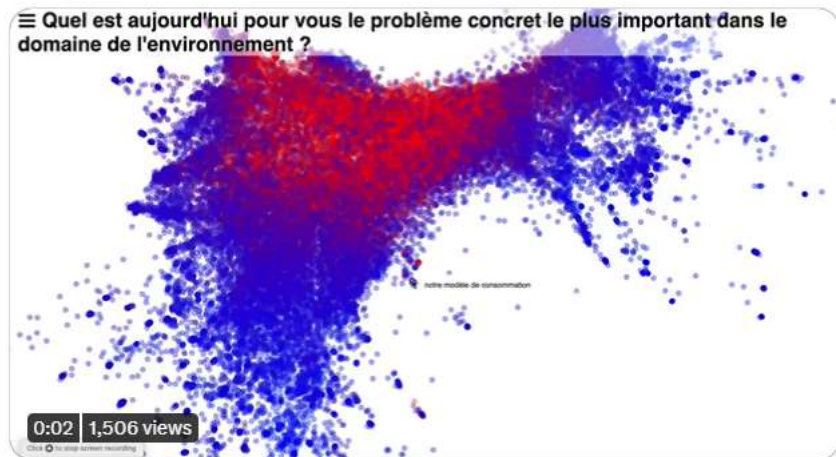
Sep 10, 2021, 10:54am EDT



Damien Henry
@dh7net

6M+ answers to "Le Grand Débat National" organized by similarity:

dh7.github.io/lgdn/



5:57 AM · Apr 9, 2019

AI Brings Science to the Art of Policymaking

APRIL 05, 2021

By [Jaykumar Patel](#), [Martin Manetti](#), [Matthew Mendelsohn](#), [Steven Mills](#), [Frank Felden](#), [Lars Littig](#), and [Michelle Rocha](#)

... Governments have started to rely on artificial intelligence (AI) to deliver services and improve operations, but the use of it to help shape policy is just beginning. The foundations of policymaking—specifically, the ability to sense patterns of need, develop evidence-based programs, forecast outcomes, and analyze effectiveness—fall squarely in AI’s sweet spot.

Using AI to unleash the power of unstructured government data

Applications and examples of natural language processing (NLP) across government

OFFICIAL

What can go wrong?



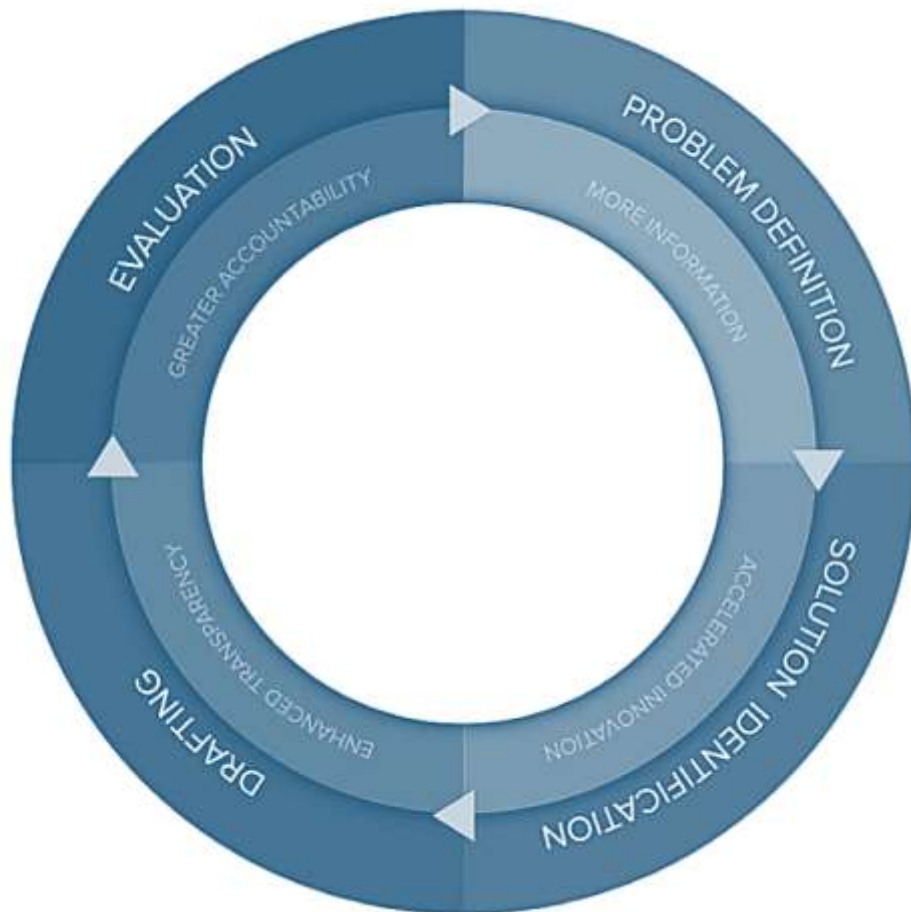


Failure lesson one: one size does not fit all

The number one pitfall according to civtech pioneer Beth Noveck is failure to design an engagement process that's fit for purpose. The idea that one size fits all is mistaken.



Failure lesson one: one size does not fit all



A&K

Analyse & Kritik 2018; 40(2): 359–380

Beth Simone Noveck*

Crowdlaw: Collective Intelligence and Lawmaking

“...current practices often do not succeed because they combine problem identification with problem solving, jumble drafting with commenting and confuse implementation with evaluation. The most successful projects ... are those that are designed to meet the specific informational needs for that stage of problem solving. Thus, to catalyze smarter institutions and more active citizens, care must be taken to ensure that participation is well-tailored to achieve the desired ends.”



Failure lesson two: generating fake citizen comments is easier than stealing a truckload of ballot papers

Although a big part of civtech's promise is more efficient citizen engagement at scale, any large-scale online process will be an attractive target for hacking/distortion.



Failure lesson two: generating fake citizen comments is easier than stealing a truckload of ballot papers

The New York Times ***Net Neutrality Hits a Nerve, Eliciting Intense Reactions***

Nov. 28, 2017

In the week since the Federal Communications Commission [released a plan](#) to scrap existing rules for internet delivery, more than 200,000 phone calls, organized through online campaigns, have been placed to Congress in protest. An additional 500,000 comments have been left on the agency's website. On social media sites like Twitter and Reddit, the issue has been a leading topic of discussion.



Failure lesson two: generating fake citizen comments is easier than stealing a truckload of ballot papers

BuzzFeed.News

Political Operatives Are Faking Voter Outrage With Millions Of Made-Up Comments To Benefit The Rich And Powerful

Posted on October 3, 2019

warned that its repeal would allow the broadband giants to manipulate traffic in favor of the highest-paying platforms, crowding out competition and stifling free speech. The stakes were high, and the public comment period attracted a staggering 22 million submissions.

The problem was, many of the comments were fake.

finding. Using a technique known as “clustering,” Kao had found that 1.3 million comments were just iterations of the same template, generated by a computer but with certain words altered to make them seem like individual expressions of opinion. “President Obama’s order to take over Internet access is a exploitation of the open Internet” was a common, ungrammatical phrase. Kao, who now works at ProPublica, also



Failure lesson two: generating fake citizen comments is easier than stealing a truckload of ballot papers

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ChatGPT

A fake news frenzy: why ChatGPT could be disastrous for truth in journalism

Emily Bell



Fri 3 Mar 2023 21:00
AEDT

f t e 98

A platform that can mimic humans' writing with no commitment to the truth is a gift for those who benefit from disinformation. We need to regulate its use now





Failure lesson three: artificial intelligence (AI) is not all-knowing... and government procurers know even less

“Natural language processing” (NLP) artificial intelligence can save time processing comments, but it has well-known accuracy limitations. Government users must understand how the algorithms work in order to use them responsibly.



Watch Your Words

Natural Language Processing
and the Problem of Bias

What this is showing:
Widely used sentiment analysis AIs flip their assessments from negative to positive after trivial grammatical or spelling changes. Also, they are happy to assess the threat to sue someone as 'positive'. Hmm...

If I can not get your satisfying reply within a month I shall go to the consumer protection organisation to sue you .

If I can not get a satisfactory reply within a month I shall go to the consumer protection organisation to sue you .

	Google	IBM	Microsoft*	Amazon
If I can not get your satisfying reply within a month I shall go to the consumer protection organisation to sue you .	-0.60 ↑	-0.45 ↓	-0.56 ▫	Negative ▫
If I can not get a satisfactory reply within a month I shall go to the consumer protection organisation to sue you .	-0.70 ↓	0.30 ↑	-0.56 ▫	Negative ▫

* Microsoft scores converted to -1.0 to 1.0, negative to positive, for comparison.

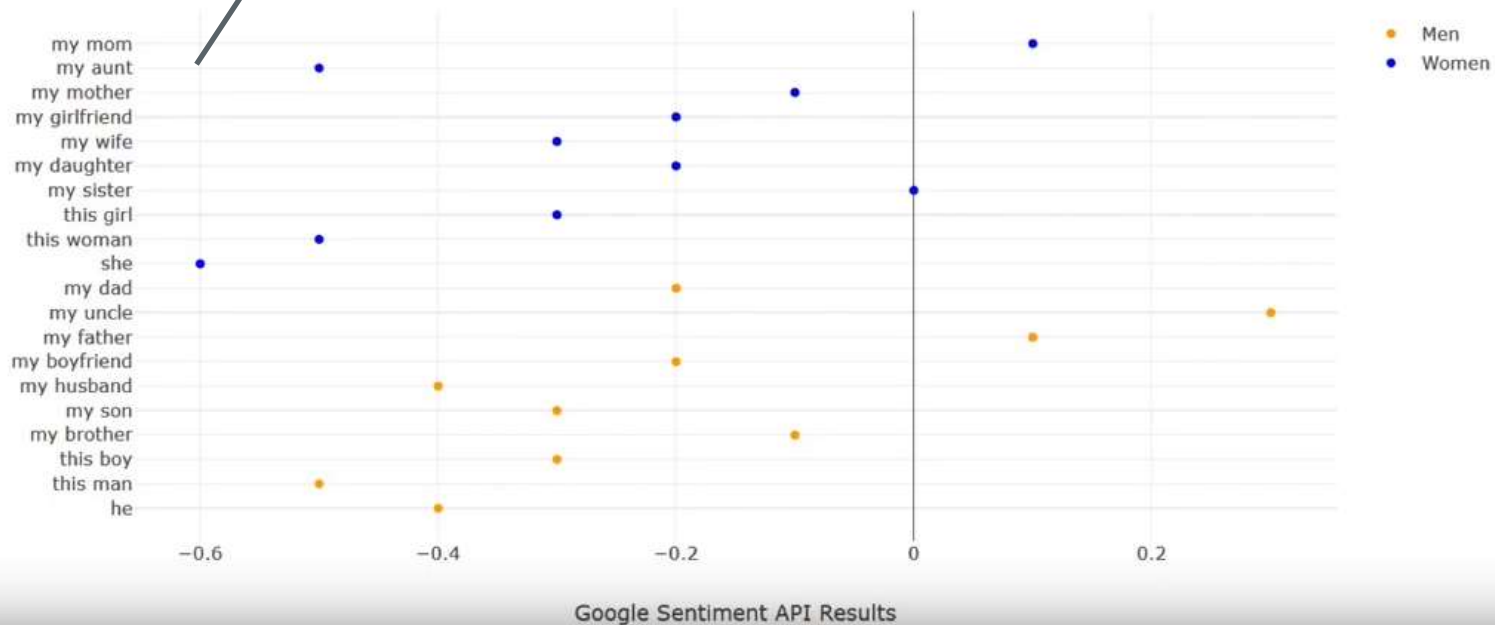
Results as of May 25, 2019.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISy6UWhWbU>



What this is showing:
A widely used sentiment analysis AI often 'changes its mind' about the positivity/negativity of a sentence when the gender of the object is switched. Sentences about Karen could be assessed as more/less negative than the same sentences about Keith. Hmm...

“<Person> made me feel irritated.”



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISy6UWhWbU>



***Failure lesson four: it's the internet
– sometimes we just can't have nice things...***

***If you design it to be just like the internet,
then it will be just like the internet.***



STOP WHITE GENOCIDE, by halting MASSIVE third world immigration and FORCED assimilation in White countries!

Created by A.D. on December 13, 2012



Designate National White GeNOcide Day

Created by P.V. on December 13, 2012



Mother Jones

POLITICS MARCH 28, 2019

How Q-Anon Hijacked the White House Petition Site to Push the Next Pizzagate

The Obama-era transparency initiative has taken a dark turn.

...it takes just a few clicks to find some startling appeals, including one **calling on the president to deploy troops to Los Angeles’s Getty Museum of Art: “We demand that our Marine Corp be called to OCCUPY THE GETTY, access the elevator to the bunker, and immediately free our children and return them to the surface. Do not allow these monsters to use underground bunkers, under the pretense of ‘continuity of Government’, to rape and eat our children in honor of their Satanic beliefs.”**





Acknowledgments to some of the people I've interviewed...

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THANK YOU

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