

SYNTHETIC POLITICS

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Definition

Synthetic politics refers to forms of political representation, communication, and organisation in which political voice is composed through computational systems and staged as a publicly addressable persona. The term does not simply denote the use of AI in campaigning, administration, or analytics. It names situations in which chatbots, avatars, virtual candidates, automated spokespersons, or agentic systems are treated as political figures that can be addressed, quoted, blamed, regulated, or invested with representative authority. “Synthetic” is used here in the philosophical sense of synthesis: the composition of heterogeneous elements, including data, models, interfaces, institutions, and human operators, into a political subject that is not reducible to any one of them. Synthetic politics therefore concerns a shift from AI as an external tool acting on politics to AI staged within politics as a figure of representation.

Context

The concept emerged because prevailing framings of AI and politics were too broad for a new set of cases. Research on politics through AI has largely focused on campaigning, participation, and administration, as in König and Wenzelburger (2020) and Supriyanto and Saputra (2022), while work on the politics of AI has centred on regulation, ethics, and governance, as in Coeckelbergh (2024) and Ulicane and Erkkilä (2023). Synthetic politics marks a narrower shift: it concerns cases in which AI is publicly staged as a political figure rather than treated only as an instrument or object of governance, a move García-Marzá and Calvo (2024) approach from the side of algorithmic democracy. Where AI politics tracks effect, synthetic politics concerns enactment.

Its genealogy predates generative AI, but generative systems make it institutionally operative. Staunæs (2025) traces earlier cases such as Wiktoria Cukt’s virtual presidential campaign in Poland in 2000 and the Social Democratic dialogue robot Rosa in Denmark in 2001, both of which already staged artificial political voice. The sequence continued with Politician SAM in New Zealand in 2017, Michihito Matsuda’s AI Mayor in Japan

in 2018, Leader Lars and The Synthetic Party in Denmark in 2022, and later governmental figures such as Romania's ION, Ukraine's Victoria Shi, and Albania's Diella, discussed by Tika (2025). By the Synthetic Summit in 2025, Schneier and Sanders (2025) help show that such cases no longer appeared as isolated curiosities but as a comparable formation spanning electoral, advisory, executive, and oppositional roles.

Synthetic politics also names a tension internal to these figures. Vuković (2024) shows how chatbot politicians combine technocratic logics with a limited populist repertoire: they are framed as neutral, data-driven, efficient, and post-ideological, while simultaneously rejecting established political intermediaries and conventional politics. However, because the constitutive populist opposition between a corrupt elite and a unified people is missing, it may be more accurate to interpret these actors through the lens of techno-optimism rather than populism in the stricter sense. The Synthetic Party in Denmark is exemplary in this regard. As Staunæs and Herrie (2024) show, its attempt to speak in the name of non-voters did not move beyond ideology so much as reorganise it through aggregation, interface, and public reception.

Related Concepts

AI-enabled analytics, Algorithm, Computer-mediated communication, Data-driven campaign, Datafication, Platform politics, Virtual communities

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