

Proposal Summary

This research project investigates the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to improve political discourse and enhance civic literacy, specifically within the context of Canada. It's an interdisciplinary study drawing from fields like education, political science, and technology to address a critical need for constructive dialogue in increasingly polarized environments.

Core Focus: The central aim is to develop and test a custom-built AI tool (a Large Language Model - LLM) designed to simulate respectful conversations about Canadian political issues. The project isn't simply *using* AI, but actively exploring how it can be *designed* to foster fairer, more balanced, and less divisive interactions.

Key Areas of Investigation:

- **Bias in AI Training Data:** A significant component involves critically examining the biases inherent in data used to train AI models. This is crucial for ensuring the tool doesn't perpetuate existing societal inequalities or reinforce harmful stereotypes within political discussions.
- **AI as a Tool for Civic Education:** The research explores how AI can be integrated into educational and community settings to promote informed engagement with politics. It seeks to understand if an AI-driven platform can help individuals better understand diverse perspectives and reflect on their own viewpoints.
- **Depolarization & Respectful Discourse:** A core goal is to create a tool that actively mitigates polarization by encouraging balanced, values-based conversations. The project aims to contribute to solutions for the challenges of misinformation and echo chambers in online political spaces.

Methodology:

The research involves several phases:

- **Literature Review:** A foundational understanding of AI, civic literacy, and existing scholarship on political discourse.
- **LLM Training & Development:** Building and refining a custom AI model specifically for this purpose.
- **Pilot Testing:** Gathering feedback from adult participants (18+) through conversations with the AI tool and subsequent surveys.
- **Data Analysis:** Analyzing participant responses to assess the effectiveness of the AI tool in fostering respectful dialogue and enhancing civic literacy.

Participant Involvement: Participants engage in a 30-45 minute (now updated to 1-2 hours) online conversation with the AI, provide feedback via surveys, and have the option to participate in an interview. All data is anonymized and confidential. A consent form outlines participant rights and ensures voluntary participation.

Dissemination & Impact:

The research findings will be submitted to the Athabasca University Research Centre and there are plans for broader dissemination through:

- Publication in interdisciplinary journals (education, political science, technology).
- Presentation at relevant conferences (adult education, governance, AI).
- Potential collaboration with not-for-profit organizations or political education programs.

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