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Privacy implications of AI and data  
optimization technologies in African  
electoral spaces

**Council of Europe**

# Integration of AI and data-optimization technologies

- In the political space, the ambit where candidates and parties are campaigning and the technical space.
- State and private sector actors involved in African elections exploit the combination of AI and populations' sensitive data to exert new forms of political and social engineering.
- In an increasing number of African countries, monitoring and controlling populations serve a securitisation agenda where converging technologies help state actors to impose surveillance and repression.

# Local and foreign stakeholders

- The political and social controls are born out of the complex alliance between a host of actors, from foreign tech-leading nations, domestic ruling elites, to Western corporations that prosper in the data-analytics and political consultancy business.
- The international lobbyists and data-brokers like the SCL Group and Cambridge Analytica form part of the “global supply chains of surveillance.” The sensitive datasets they collect give them an advantage in the current race for strategic positioning in Africa.

# Country legal & political context

- Data and technological governance suffers from a lack of robust regulatory and oversight mechanisms.
- Privacy and data protection laws are not translated into robust operational mechanisms.
- A dearth of normative capacity-building and meaningful accountability has left populations and civil society vulnerable.

# Vignettes from Africa

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- Kenya's 2013 and 2017 elections witnessed the invasion of mobile phone and social media networks as well as traditional media.
- A number of countries entering an era where artificial intelligence (AI) and data-capture technologies converge to analyse digital bodies and minds.
- In 2019, nearly 40 million Kenyans had their fingerprints and faces scanned by a new biometric ID system that will play a crucial role in the next 2022 election.
- In February 2019, the French company, Gemalto, announced a smart-policing collaboration with the Uganda Police Force to deploy portable biometric devices that use AI to confirm a match on the spot

# Impact

- Converging technologies are increasingly designed to anticipate and nudge human attitudes and behaviours, with the drastic potential to impact privacy including group privacy and to manipulate and restrict political agency.
- The rationale behind such sophisticated disinformation architecture is to immerse citizens in an alternative, virtual reality where they themselves become producers of digital manipulation.
- Power over life: biopower: “[A] power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations.”
- In an era of technological convergence, algorithms essentially amplify biopower, augmenting technologies’ potential to regulate societies’ collective body.

# Addressing the issues

- Multilateral institutions need to exert normative leadership to help empower and protect African populations in the digital economy.
- Sensitize Electoral Management Bodies, law makers, political party representatives, media and civil society to the emerging threats which jeopardize the democratic character of elections.
- Normative capacity-building and meaningful accountability to protect populations and civil society

# Addressing the issues

- Need to question the tensions around the digital economy's social contract: What is the balance between individual rights and state-command of collective security and prosperity in the digital economy?
- They will also need to stress-test these normative practices in the context of different scenarios where privacy could be breached and personal data abused, resulting in human right violations.



# Eleonore Pauwels's Report, "Anatomy of Information Disorders in Africa" written for the Konrad-Adenauer- Stiftung.