

POLITICAL CROWDSOURCING

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Definition

Political crowdsourcing refers to the practice of engaging a wide range of citizens in co-creating political ideas, policy proposals, campaign content, or strategic input. This model enables political organizations to harness collective intelligence, enhance participatory legitimacy, and foster inclusion, horizontal decision-making, and bottom-up approaches. Unlike digital aggregative tools such as online consultations, referenda, or e-voting, which only collect opinions or votes, crowdsourcing implies co-creation of content and active citizen involvement in shaping political outputs.

Context

The digitalization of politics has significantly reshaped how political organizations engage citizens in decision-making processes, paving the way for new participatory models such as political crowdsourcing. This method enables citizens to contribute meaningfully to policy development, campaign messaging, and strategic planning. This model is rooted in values such as horizontality, inclusivity, and bottom-up engagement, positioning the crowd not merely as voters or respondents, but as problem solvers and co-authors of political content (Vromen et al., 2022).

The rise of digital parties played a pivotal role in mainstreaming political crowdsourcing (Gerbaudo, 2019). These parties developed or adopted online participatory platforms that allowed members and supporters to generate policy proposals, discuss priorities, and collaborate on campaign initiatives. Notable examples include Spain's Partido X, which utilized open-source tools to facilitate direct citizen input across all aspects of its political activities. Italy's Five Star Movement (M5S) utilized the *Rousseau* platform to enable members to vote on candidates, draft laws, and establish internal agendas. In Finland, the Open Ministry project allowed citizens to collectively draft and submit legislative proposals to Parliament. Other parties across the ideological spectrum have experimented with similar tools. The Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), in response to historically low polling in 2014, launched a political innovation project called *Evolution Volkspartei*, using a digital crowdsourcing platform ("Ideenwand") to engage over 5,000 citizens in co-creating its party manifesto by contributing ideas, commenting, and voting on proposals. Podemos initiated Plaza Podemos as part of its commitment to deliberative and direct democracy, an open, participatory digital platform (2014–2019) that enabled anyone, inside or outside the party, to propose, debate, and endorse citizen initiatives (Meloni & Lupato, 2022).

Political crowdsourcing has been praised for lowering the costs of participation compared to traditional engagement formats such as focus groups or in-person assemblies. It enables the rapid collection of feedback and ideas, particularly when supported by technological infrastructure such as data analytics and automation tools (Taeihagh, 2017). However, the implementation of these platforms has also revealed several limitations. Although many initiatives began with considerable enthusiasm, their use has declined over time due to limited interaction between policymakers and citizens, as exemplified by the digital tool Lex Eletti used by the Italian Five Star Movement between 2013 and 2021 (Tronconi & Blasio, 2025). This is partly due to the inherent difficulty of digitalizing deliberative processes, which require sustained engagement, dialogue, and trust. As a result, political parties often shift away from deliberative tools toward simpler, aggregative mechanisms that are easier to manage and control (Sandri et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the promise of democratization through crowdsourcing is often tempered by the reality of leadership-driven decision-making. In some cases, participatory tools have been scaled back or removed altogether (Deseriis & Vittori, 2019). For instance, Podemos eventually deactivated its digital participatory platform, which was initially intended to serve as a deliberative space for policy input. This retreat highlights how such initiatives may be vulnerable to internal centralization and platform fatigue. In addition, concerns around digital inequality, exclusion of non-digital citizens, and opaque platform governance continue to pose significant challenges to the inclusive and transformative potential of political crowdsourcing.

Related Concepts

Digital Activism; Digital Engagement; Digital Party; E-democracy; Political crowdfunding; Public Consultations

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