



Social Research Call

INVISIBLE CHOICES: How Search Engines and LLMs shape political visibility and trust



Acronym: INVIS_AI

Project leader: Joana Gonçalves-Sá

Host organisation: LIP

Main purpose of the project: The project addresses the growing influence of algorithmic systems on access to political information and democratic processes. It investigates how search engines (SEs) and large language models (LLMs) shape the visibility of political actors and issues in Portugal and Spain and whether these systems introduce systematic biases through algorithmic mediation.

Design/methodology/approach: INVIS_AI combines large-scale audits, a system to evaluate potential bias, and controlled online experiments. Automated bots simulate realistic interactions with SEs and LLMs, while systematically changing query wording, language, and other variables. Platform outputs are compared with external benchmarks and experimental studies gauge output's effects on users' trust and perceptions.

Potential results: INVIS_AI will produce four key outputs: 1) multilingual, cross-platform datasets of political information returned by SEs, and LLMs; 2) an open audit infrastructure to help identify patterns of political visibility and algorithmic amplification in different languages and countries, 3) a test of whether these patterns influence user perceptions; and 4) an indicator to measure deviations from offline political reality.

Social relevance of the research: As SEs and LLMs increasingly act as gatekeepers of political information, greater transparency about how they shape access is essential. Together with a key stakeholder (Entidade Reguladora para a Comunicação Social- ERC), INVIS_AI will foster informed public debate on platform governance and provide evidence on how automated choices shape political visibility. Its findings will support policymakers, journalists, and civil society in monitoring media pluralism.

Originality/value of the project: INVIS_AI combines privacy-preserving, bot-based auditing with controlled experiments to link platform behaviour to user-level effects. The project will provide one of the first systematic comparative audits of SEs and LLMs in Portuguese and Spanish contexts.