

When do Citizens Resist Using AI Algorithms in Public Policy?

In recent years, there has been a significant rise in the use of algorithmic decision-making systems (ADSs) to assist or replace human decision-making in a wide range of policy contexts. These include decisions on issues such as policing, criminal sentencing, and social welfare assistance. How do citizens view the incorporation of this technology in making high-stakes decisions? This introduces a new theory to explain the conditions under which citizens view ADSs as legitimate, fair, and accurate, and tests it using a series of original experiments embedded in a national U.S. survey. Results show that citizens are more likely to accept the use of ADSs in decisions that are designed to assist rather than to sanction, and when they are required to make inferences on collectives rather than individuals. The findings are generalizable to a wide range of decisions and robust across diverse policy domains. Overall, the theory and evidence presented provide novel insights into the way ADSs can be used in public policy and the political implications of this growing phenomenon.