



# ODI Policy Manifesto: Executive Summary

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March 2024

## Introduction

2024 is a big year for democracy, with billions of people voting in elections across the globe. A general election will be triggered before the end of the year here in the UK and will probably be held in 2024, given that the Prime Minister's '[working assumption](#) is we'll have a general election in the second half of this year'.<sup>1</sup>

Issues around data, digital and technology will be more prominent in this election campaign than in previous years. The rapid development and wide availability of artificial intelligence (AI) systems – for which [data is the feedstock](#) – has generated an explosion of interest in AI and its potential political consequences. The Post Office Horizon scandal has come to the forefront of public consciousness – and joins other global outrages, such as [Robodebt](#) (Australia) the [child care benefits affair](#) (the Netherlands) and the UK's own [exam algorithm fiasco](#), in reminding us what can go wrong with blind faith in data-enabled decisions and technology. [Slovakia's elections](#) are among those showing the dangers of deepfakes. The controversial [Data Protection and Digital Information Bill](#) continues its parliamentary passage, and the government's [response to its AI white paper consultation](#) set out some steps towards AI regulation but could go much further in thinking about data issues and data infrastructure.

This manifesto outlines policies that the Open Data Institute (ODI) wants to see in parties' manifesto commitments and as part of the political discussion for the next election.

The ODI was founded on a belief in trust and openness – essential features for a world where data works for everyone. [Our five-year strategy](#), published in 2023, outlines six guiding principles in response to global trends, including those surrounding AI and other technological advancements. We have organised our policy ideas around those principles.

Ahead of the general election, we would like to see all political parties engage with these themes and recognise their importance as foundational for building a thriving data—and, with it, a thriving AI—ecosystem that benefits people, the environment, and the economy.

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<sup>1</sup> An election has to be held by 28 January 2025; parliament will be dissolved on 17 December 2024 if an election has not already been called; the Prime Minister can ask the King to dissolve parliament and call an election at any time before then; many commentators expect [an election in November](#), with some speculation about an earlier date.

# The ODI's guiding principles

## Principle 1 - Strong data infrastructure

- A robust and future-proofed legislative and regulatory regime that is cohesive and comprehensive, and has people and society, as well as the economy, at its heart
- Improved data infrastructure that enables key societal and governmental challenges to be solved
- Rolling out Smart Data schemes to benefit consumers
- Better collection, maintenance, and use of data for better public services, backed by minimum standards and funding (including for local services, not just central government)

## Principle 2 - The best possible foundation for strong data infrastructure is open data

- A refreshed government strategy around open data and data availability, making data findable, accessible, interoperable and usable

## Principle 3 - There needs to be trust

- A more participatory data future where the data ecosystem is diverse and inclusive, and people are empowered to play an active role
- Reforms to the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill for a more trustworthy legislative regime
- Establishing strategic funds to help create positive applications of both data and AI and allow proper scrutiny of AI systems
- Investing in data assurance to enable trusted and trustworthy data practices

## Principle 4 - Trusted, independent organisations

- Strategic and long-term funds to support civil society and campaigning organisations working on data and AI
- Clear commitment to include diverse civil society voices in data and AI decision-making

## Principle 5 - A diverse, equitable and inclusive data ecosystem

- Ensuring equitable access to data for growth and innovation purposes
- Greater researcher access to data from (eg) social media platforms
- Reforms to the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill which will help foster a diverse, equitable and inclusive data ecosystem

## Principle 6 - Data knowledge and skills

- Greater data literacy among policymakers and leaders in business and the public sector
- Greater data literacy among the public

# Overview of recommendations

## Principle 1: Strong data infrastructure

1. A robust legislative and regulatory regime for people, society and economy	2. Improved data infrastructure for key societal/ governmental challenges	3. Rolling out Smart Data schemes to benefit consumers	4. Improved data for better public services, backed by minimum standards
<p>The DPDI bill should do more to build public trust</p> <p>Recognition of the importance of data in the AI White Paper (a 6th ‘principle’ on data)</p> <p>Open data as key to the work of regulators</p>	<p>Addressing gaps in data infrastructure to help tackle key social challenges, including the cost of living</p> <p>Better AI data infrastructure and making data AI-ready</p> <p>Extend the FOI Act to companies providing public services</p>	<p>A single ambitious strategy with a realistic timetable for rolling out smart data across sectors</p>	<p>Public sector data assets, standards, tech, guidance, organisations and communities</p> <p>Worker access to data and technology that meets minimum standards for opportunities from data and AI</p>

## Principle 2: Open data as foundational

### 1. Refreshed government strategy on open data (making data findable, accessible, interoperable and usable)

Refresh of the government’s open data policy - as promised in 2022 - to include guidance on interoperability, data standards, ethics, explainability, and more

Ensuring foundational/high-value datasets are open, eg the Postcode Address File

## Principle 3: Trust in data

1. A more participatory data future	2. Reforms the to DPDI bill for a more trustworthy legislative regime	3. Strategic funds for positive AI applications and proper scrutiny	4. A greater focus on data assurance
<p>Meaningful participation in data policy and operations - empowering people to shape how data is used across sectors and for the public good</p>	<p>Requiring (open) DPIA publishing</p> <p>Dropping DWP powers to access claimants’ bank accounts and govt access to voters’ data pre-election</p>	<p>Similar to US govt \$200m fund advancing AI for social good</p> <p>Support for the role of independent stakeholders in research/scrutiny</p>	<p>Support skills and standards development</p> <p>Demonstrate best practices through data assurance activities</p>

## Principle 4: Trusted, independent organisations

1. Strategic funds to support civil society and campaigning organisations working on data and AI	2. Clear commitment to include diverse civil society voices in data and AI decision-making
<p>Funds to support organisations helping people to exercise data rights, preventing harms/inequalities from the use of data-enabled technologies</p> <p>Active support to credible, independent organisations, preventing increasing power asymmetries influencing public sector data space and data and AI regulation</p>	<p>Stronger and more diverse civil society voice in government data and AI initiatives, for example, work of the AI Safety Institute, to bridge the gaps between government, public sector, private sector, and the public</p>

## Principle 5: A diverse, equitable and inclusive data ecosystem

1. Ensuring equitable access to data for growth and innovation purposes	2. Greater researcher access to data from (eg) social media platforms	3. Reforms to the DPDI bill which will help foster a diverse, equitable and inclusive data ecosystem
<p>Helping as many sectors, communities and people as possible to access the data, data infrastructure and data skills they need</p> <p>Ensuring fair and equitable data access is mandated for use cases with significant societal implications</p>	<p>Mandating researcher access to data from social media platforms is essential and was not achieved under the Online Safety Act</p> <p>Legislation should focus on the need to understand harms affecting marginalised groups</p>	<p>Improvements to the DPDI bill already mentioned address this objective</p> <p>DPIAs (impact assessments) reformed for consideration of DEI issues - eg proactive review of dataset harms</p>

## Principle 6: Data knowledge and skills

1. Greater data literacy among leaders, including in business and public sector	2. Greater data literacy among the public
<p>Ensuring non-specialists are beneficiaries of data literacy provision</p> <p>Schemes and strategies to support future leaders with data literacy skills and knowledge, working across the population</p> <p>Recognition of data skills as key to addressing environmental challenges</p>	<p>Commitment to upskilling people across all groups for a world with data and AI</p> <p>Inclusivity and diversity at the centre of data literacy and skills strategies and approaches, as many groups are at risk of exclusion</p> <p>This prevents a limited pool of people being able to work with and make decisions about data and data-enabled technologies</p>

This document summarises the Open Data Institute's 2024 Policy Manifesto. The full version will be made available on our website. If you would like to discuss our work further, please contact the ODI Policy Team at [policy.team@theodi.org](mailto:policy.team@theodi.org).