2 October 2026

Afrobarometer AI guidelines for authors

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has evolved significantly over the last few decades. Major advances in machine learning laid the groundwork for today's AI systems, which are capable of complex tasks such as image recognition, language comprehension, and strategic game play.

While traditional AI systems are designed to classify, predict, or optimise based on input data, generative AI creates new content – text, images, code, and more – by learning patterns from massive data sets. Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Claude, and DeepSeek use large language models (LLMs) to generate human-like responses and compositions, representing a major leap in how AI can interact with users and assist with creative or analytical work.

Since the launch of ChatGPT in late 2022, generative AI usage has surged across industries, including among researchers, journalists, and other writers. This widespread adoption has raised urgent questions around transparency, integrity, and authorship. As generative AI becomes increasingly embedded in content-creation workflows, organisations face a growing need to establish clear policies outlining how these tools can be used and by whom, when disclosures are required, and what responsibilities authors hold. Such guidelines are essential for ensuring ethical use, protecting privacy and intellectual property, and maintaining trust and credibility in organisational outputs.

Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide clarity to Afrobarometer (AB) authors regarding permissions, obligations, and ethical standards vis-à-vis AI usage, especially generative AI.

Permissions

How may AI be used by AB authors? Below is a list of "dos" and "don'ts" that, while not exhaustive, provide overarching guidelines for appropriate AI usage. In the event of doubt regarding the permissibility of any particular application of generative AI, authors are requested to contact a member of the AB Publications team for advice:

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Dos:

- ***Brainstorm possible research topics or angles.***
- ***Assist with research.*** This can be done in a variety of ways, including by summarising literature, pointing to important findings, translating work in other languages, and highlighting relevant current affairs.

- ***Copy edit.*** This can improve spelling, sentence structure, grammar, style, and formatting. It may be especially useful for non-native English/French authors.
- ***Support analytics.*** AI tools may provide valuable suggestions regarding data visualisation, chart construction, and the interpretation of findings.

Don'ts:

- ***Don't conceal AI usage.*** This amounts to a violation of ethical research standards.
- ***Don't present AI content as original.*** As with any misattribution, taking credit for something that is not one's own work counts as plagiarism. This does not mean that generative AI usage should be included as in-text citations, footnotes, or the reference list; however, it does mean that all AI usage should be reported with submissions to National Partners/Core Partners/the AB Analysis unit.
- ***Don't copy and paste text verbatim.*** LLMs generate text based on probabilistic patterns rather than original thought, and they do not always produce verifiable or up-to-date sources. Copying and pasting AI-generated content without modification or citation can result in factual inaccuracies, misleading statements, or outdated information. For these reasons, and to avoid issues of plagiarism, authors should never copy and paste AI-generated text.
- ***Don't use AI-generated or AI-assisted material without personally verifying that it is accurate.***
- ***Don't upload sensitive, proprietary, or private data into AI tools.*** AI tools are trained on all available input, including what is entered as a prompt. Once uploaded, one no longer has authority over who may access data, meaning that the sharing of certain data may constitute transgressions of intellectual property or privacy. In particular, restricted Afrobarometer data sets (e.g. data sets that have not been released publicly) should never be uploaded to an AI tool. Authors need to be cognisant of potential violations of third-party intellectual-property rights (e.g. data, images, logos). As a rule, users are requested to switch off permission to use Afrobarometer data for general training of AI models. (A guide on how to do that can be found here.)
- ***Don't use AI-generated images of "people."*** Afrobarometer strongly discourages the use of AI-generated images. In rare instances, AI-generated images (not showing "people") may be used for illustrative purposes. Such images should be reported using standard image-attribution guidelines.

Authorial responsibilities

Authors must be guided by transparency, accountability, critical thinking, and integrity in all that they do.

It is AB's strict policy that **AI tools and applications will never be considered authors**, and that **authors remain responsible for all content they submit for publication under the AB logo**. It is therefore essential that authors adhere to ethical research practices and maintain integrity when integrating AI-generated content into their writing.

Generative AI is a useful tool for summarising ideas and pointing authors toward sources of information to explore. But given the potential problems with AI-generated content, **it is**

essential that authors engage critically with all AI-generated content. One helpful way to do this is to ask for links or other sources that can be double-checked for accuracy. This includes reviewing the sources provided to ensure that any attributions, including quotes, are present in the source material and correct. Remember that original sources are always required when work is cited. **Authors should not rely on AI tools as their sole, or even primary, source of information.** Authors should take care to internalise AI output and rewrite text to accord with both their own ideas and AB's stylistics requirements.

It is AB policy that authors notify AB Network staff of any and all AI usage that goes beyond the use of basic software to check or correct spelling, grammar, style, or formatting. They may do so using the AI disclosure form pasted below. **Where appropriate, AB publications will include a note (subject to the author's review and approval) about the author's use of AI.**

Afrobarometer reserves the right to use AI-detection software to identify unreported AI use.

AI disclosure form for authors

In accordance with Afrobarometer AI guidelines, and as a condition of publication, please use the table below to tell us how (if at all) you used AI tools in the preparation of your publication. Note that use of AI to check or correct spelling, grammar, style, or formatting need not be listed.

Tool/Model/Version (List each AI tool you used. If none, write "None" in the first row.)	Date used	What was it used for? (See examples listed below, but please describe your specific use)	AB data entered? (Y/N/NA)
e.g. ChatGPT (GPT-5)	*e.g. Aug 2026*	*e.g. Describing results shown in Figure 7 and Figure 10.*	*N*

Please endorse by typing your initials:

__ The authors have reviewed and are responsible for all content.

Examples of AI use:

Writing or debugging statistical code

Data preparation

Data analysis

Data visualisation

Finding or summarising relevant literature, gathering background information, etc.

Brainstorming structure

Developing or refining research questions, hypotheses, arguments, or theoretical frameworks

Interpreting or explaining research findings, statistical results, or other analytical outputs

Translating your draft

Gathering critiques on sections of your draft

Gathering critiques on your entire draft

Producing first drafts of passages or sections of the manuscript

Producing a draft of most or all of the publication