



Artificial Intelligence, Digital Politics, and Governance: Power, Accountability, and the Reordering of the Democratic State

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ABSTRACT

The diffusion of artificial intelligence into the machinery of politics and public administration is no longer a speculative concern but an operating condition of contemporary governance. This paper examines how AI reshapes the exercise of political power through three interlocking channels — the automation of bureaucratic discretion, the algorithmic mediation of public opinion and electoral communication, and the concentration of infrastructural control over compute, data, and foundation models in a small number of firms and states. Drawing on OECD Digital Government Outlook data, national AI governance frameworks including the European Union AI Act, India's AI Governance Guidelines (2025), and cross-country evidence on AI-generated electoral disinformation between 2024 and 2026, the study develops what it terms the AI-Power-Accountability Nexus, a framework linking technical infrastructure, institutional capacity, and democratic legitimacy. It argues that the central governance risk is not rogue algorithmic malfunction but the routinisation of opaque, concentrated decision authority inside institutions poorly equipped to contest it. The paper concludes with policy recommendations oriented toward institutional capacity-building, infrastructural sovereignty, and participatory oversight rather than purely technical fixes.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Digital Governance, Algorithmic Accountability, Disinformation, Platform Power, AI Regulation, Digital Public Infrastructure.

Introduction

Today, a citizen applying for welfare in India usually interacts with technology first. AI chatbots, facial recognition, or data models often handle her file before a human official sees it. Around the world, the daily tasks of governing are moving from strict, human-written laws to systems that learn from data. This paper explores how this shift affects political power and our ability to hold it accountable.

AI impacts politics in three main ways: as **an administrative tool** that helps make government decisions, **a communicative tool** that shapes voter beliefs during elections, and **an infrastructural tool** controlled by a few powerful tech companies or nations. Experts often treat these as separate problems—like issues with government, fake news, or monopolies—rather than considering the bigger picture.

Farrell (2025) points out that political scientists have not said much about AI, even though it significantly affects our markets, bureaucracies, and democracies. This paper aims to address that gap. Instead of seeing AI as just a niche policy issue, we view it as a broad force that is reshaping government power, election fairness, and global tech control.

The paper is organized as follows. First, it reviews current research on AI and governance. Next, it examines how AI rules have changed since 2023, providing real-world examples from India, the EU, the US, and other places. Finally, it introduces a new analytical framework—the **AI-Power-Accountability Nexus** and concludes with key challenges and policy recommendations.

Literature Review

Farrell (2025), writing in the *Annual Review of Political Science*, proposes that AI's political consequences be understood under two headings: AI as a technology of governance that classifies information at scale and thereby reshapes markets, bureaucracy, and democracy, and AI as an object of governance requiring new institutions of oversight. This framing underlies much of the subsequent literature reviewed here.

Christian Katzenbach and Lena Ulbricht did pioneering work on the concept of 'algorithmic governance'; they pointed out that controversies across the public sector and digital communication indicate that digital technologies produce social ordering in a specific way, which later became clear through research done on automated content moderation and predictive policy.

Safiya Umoja Noble (2020) discovered that there is a direct link between the architecture of commercial search engines and the reinforcement of oppressive social relationships.

This correlation has consistently appeared in subsequent observations of technological redlining.

Ruha Benjamin (2023) persuasively contends, the tech industry's unusually high rate of algorithmic prejudice among its platforms has nothing to do with mathematical neutrality and everything to do with the fact that these systems repackage historical white supremacy, which influences both who they surveil as well as how much agency users retain, all while populations are simultaneously governed through technology after technology.

Recent studies show that national AI governance frameworks have quickly emerged around the world since 2024. This research points out different regional strategies. For example, the EU has introduced its risk-tiered AI Act, South Korea has the AI Basic Act from 2026, and India has its principle-based guidelines from 2025. Generally, these changes indicate a worldwide move toward mixed governance models. According to **the OECD (2026)**, most member countries now combine binding regulations with soft-law tools, including voluntary standards and ethical principles.

Institutional and Historical Context

E-Governance to Algorithmic Governance

The Shift: Early digital government from the 2000s to 2010s only digitized processes created by humans. Today, algorithmic governance relies on machine-learned, self-revising rules that are often unclear to officials.

OECD Focus (2026): Member states are moving beyond basic AI strategies. They are now tackling the tougher tasks of building trust frameworks, data governance, and human-centered oversight.

The Regulatory Turn (2023–2026)

Global Standard: The EU AI Act and South Korea's AI Basic Act, which takes effect in January 2026, establish risk-tiered regulatory models based on impact.

India's Current Stance: India does not have a standalone AI law. It relies on existing laws such as the DPDPA 2023, the IT Act, and IP law until the Digital India Act is passed.

India's Soft Law: In November 2025, guidelines introduced seven non-binding principles (like trust and fairness) along with bodies such as an AI Safety Institute.

Future Push: A private member's AI Bill set for December 2025 indicates a growing demand in parliament for binding regulations.

Infrastructural Sovereignty & The Compute Divide

The Bottleneck: India generates about 20% of global data but is heavily dependent on US-based cloud providers and foreign chips due to limited domestic data center capacity.

India AI Mission Response: A white paper released in December 2025 suggested treating compute and models as Digital Public Goods. The aim is a tenfold expansion of data centers by 2030. By May 2025, the mission had already deployed over 34,000 subsidized GPUs, surpassing its initial target of 10,000.

The Sovereign AI Movement: This structural “compute divide” is pushing for greater infrastructural independence across the Global South.

Observations: Ground-Level Realities

Elections and the Information Environment

The 2024 to 2025 global elections showed that AI’s effect on political disinformation was smaller than expected, but it could still create major disruptions. Overall, content generated by AI made up less than one percent of flagged material. Traditional “cheap fakes” were much more common, and AI often appeared in satire and trolling. However, even with this low volume, AI was still used in several high-profile and significant ways. This included a fake Biden robocall in the U.S., idealized political ads in Germany, and coordinated interference that led Romania to cancel its presidential election.

"Hume samajh nahi aata ki video asli hai ya AI se bana hai — bas jo WhatsApp par aata hai use aage bhejte hain." (We can't tell if a video is real or AI-made anymore — we just forward whatever comes on WhatsApp.) — first-time voter, north Indian district, 2024 general election field observation

Algorithmic Administration in Practice

AI plays a major role in administrative decisions related to welfare, credit, housing, and law enforcement. In the U.S., predictive models create a situation where surveillance increases while transparency decreases. In India, digital public infrastructure, including Aadhaar, has improved financial inclusion. However, its use in AI-assisted eligibility has raised worries about unfair exclusions for informal workers and migrants.

Platform Power and Regulatory Capture

There is a significant gap between leading AI companies and regulatory agencies. In the U.S., corporate lobbying strongly impacts legislative agendas. This often emphasizes narrow fixes, like content labeling, rather than broad reforms that address market concentration and engagement-based business models.

Analysis: The AI-Power-Accountability Nexus

A Conceptual Framework

The AI-Power-Accountability Nexus ties together concentrated computing infrastructure, the ability of institutions to regulate, and the communication environment shaped by AI.

Monopolies in infrastructure limit the resources regulators need for oversight. This allows unchecked communication manipulation, making each part influence the others.

Algorithmic Opacity as Structural, Not Individual, Harm

Problems like biased welfare algorithms or manipulative recommender systems arise from regular institutional practices rather than individual wrongdoing. This structural harm means governance efforts that only target bad actors will not solve the bigger issues.

The Sovereignty–Accountability Trade-off

Developing sovereign AI capabilities reduces reliance on foreign infrastructure. However, concentrating power in state agencies only replaces private monopolies with public ones unless there is strong independent oversight, judicial capacity, and mechanisms for algorithmic freedom of information.

Key Issues and Challenges

Regulatory Capacity Lags Technical Change

Legislative and judicial updates consistently trail behind AI deployment. India does not have a binding standalone AI law. U.S. state deepfake laws face court challenges. The EU's AI Act struggles to keep up with rapid advancements in foundation models.

The Compute and Data Divide

Countries that do not have sovereign compute face a structural dependency. Regulation cannot replace the technical ability needed to independently audit training data and conduct adversarial tests on deployed systems.

Electoral Integrity in an Uncertain Threat Environment

Currently, cheap fakes dominate election disinformation. However, audio deepfakes and mass-personalized, psychologically targeted persuasion are developing quickly. These present threats that existing detection and labeling systems cannot manage yet.

Fragmented Accountability for Algorithmic Administrative Decisions

Traditional administrative law does not offer clear ways for citizens to challenge automated welfare, policing, or credit decisions. Redress mechanisms have not kept up with algorithmic systems.

Lobbying Asymmetry and Regulatory Capture

Intense lobbying and technical concentration in a few elite firms direct governance debates toward quick fixes like watermarking. This approach overlooks deeper issues such as market concentration and data-training consent.

Policy Recommendations

1. Build independent technical auditing capacity within regulators, for example, through statutory AI safety institutes, instead of relying on companies' self-reported compliance.
2. Consider compute and data sovereignty as a key governance requirement. Combine national public compute investments with mandated access for independent researchers and regulator audits.
3. Focus on high-risk election AI formats first such as synthetic robocalls and hyper-personalized messaging, rather than implementing broad content bans that could stifle legitimate commentary.
4. Revise administrative law to ensure enforceable citizen rights to explanation, human review, and appeal for algorithmic decisions in welfare, policing, and credit systems.
5. Increase transparency in AI lobbying by requiring the disclosure of AI-related lobbying expenses and any industry-funded research submitted to regulators.
6. Seek regional and multilateral coordination to avoid a regulatory race to the bottom while allowing states to establish cultural and linguistic safeguards that fit their context.
7. Directly fund civic and journalistic verification efforts, as technical detection tools alone cannot address complex social and institutional information issues.

Conclusion

AI is changing how governance works. Recent evidence from 2024 to 2026 shows that the biggest effects are on infrastructure and administration. Low-tech "cheap fakes" have proven to be more disruptive to elections than advanced AI disinformation.

The real risk is not a single algorithmic disaster, but the routine use of unclear, concentrated decision-making in governments and corporations that citizens cannot easily contest.

To tackle this risk, we need to move from just labeling AI content to building independent technical skills, ensuring infrastructure is under local control, and establishing enforceable rights.

In the end, the success of recent frameworks, such as the EU AI Act and India's 2025 guidelines, will rely on whether regulatory bodies have the resources and authority to enforce them.

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