

T10P03 / Critical perspectives on global AI policy and governance

Topic : T10 / POLICY DISCOURSE, CRITICAL POLICY RESEARCH

Chair : Regine Paul (Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Societies, Köln, Germany)

Second Chair : Ching-Fu Lin (National Tsinghua University)

Third Chair : Azadeh Akbari (Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The panel aims to bring together an interdisciplinary set of scholars exploring artificial intelligence (AI) policy and governance from across the globe. It seeks to push the frontiers of the state-of-the-art with critical research inquiries across four dimensions:

(1) Conceptually, the panel addresses scholarly complacency with "techno-solutionist" ideology (Morozov 2014; Paul 2022). It explores how, and to what effect, notions of rational problem-solving and discourses proposing technical fixes for ethical questions such as algorithmic bias, explainability, or undemocratic surveillance depoliticise AI governance. How can we apply, inter alia, normative democracy theory, gender studies, decolonial lenses, critical political economy, or studies on grassroots movements most fruitfully to explore the hidden politics of governing (with) AI and inequalities resulting from it?

(2) Analytically speaking, the panel draws on the – so far rare – work of policy analysts and science and technology scholars focusing on the concrete practices of governing AI beyond “the letter of the law”, for example by using ethnographic methods to generate data (i.e. in the case of predictive policing ‘on the ground’: Sandhu and Fussey 2021; Selten et al. 2023). How do public authorities across the world use chatbots or algorithmic scoring systems in their daily operations, how do they concretize existing AI policies when doing so (Liu, Lin and Chen 2019)? How do actors in regulatory sandboxes or standardization fora struggle over meanings of “responsible AI”? How do such policy concretizations vary across space, why so, and to what effect for global AI governance? How do Big Tech corporations tap into the data wealth of marginalized communities in their increasing involvement in the humanitarian sector?

(3) Empirically, the panel enriches existing analyses on European and North American cases. Based on our experience in running the Surveillance in the Majority World Network (Akbari), we aim to explore articulations of AI policy and governance in usually marginalized places, all while contextualizing them in geopolitical power struggle over AI between the US, China and Europe (Bradford 2023). For example, how do Asian jurisdictions negotiate a common AI governance framework or facilitate normative interactions when faced with the rise of China as a regulatory power? How do diverse political, economic, and cultural contexts in Asian or Latin American jurisdictions shape AI governance regimes at multiple levels? How do global autocratisation tendencies affect efforts for “human-centric” AI governance? How do colonial legacies shape tech diplomacy interactions between African countries and Europe and what strategies emerge to counteract hegemonic global AI governance (Birhane 2020; Omutobora and Basu 2024)?

(4) The panel aims to unfold societal impact by going beyond a "desk-based critique" of contemporary AI governance. Inspired by critical AI studies (Pasquinelli 2023), surveillance studies (Akbari 2022) and critical policy studies (Fischer 2016), we ask: how can our joint research, engaging critically with ideology and power in contemporary AI policy and governance, help generate alternative pathways for more democratic and sustainable AI futures? How can collaborative interdisciplinary work and policymaking address the complex global nature of AI governance in an intersectional and situated way?

CALL FOR PAPERS

AI is reshaping societies across the globe, but discourses surrounding its governance have often been conditioned by uneven power dynamics, techno-solutionist ideologies, and lack of socio-economic contexts. As AI systems become integral also public sector decision-making and define how various actors exercise authority at various governance levels, it is crucial to critically examine how AI governance frameworks are constructed. How do policy norms and practices travel across the globe? To what extent do they reflect the diverse social, economic, cultural, and political underpinnings in respective jurisdictions or regions? How do

countries outside the global power centers (in this case: the US, China and Europe) adapt, localize, re-shape, negotiate, or resist global norms and institutional regulatory frameworks?

We call for papers which explore the deeper political, ethical, legal, and social dimensions of global AI governance, with a special emphasis on the diverse theoretical, empirical, and methodological perspectives across contexts. We invite scholars from across disciplines—political science, ethics, law, technology studies, gender studies, decolonial studies, critical political economy, and more—to submit papers that engage with the following themes and questions:

Conceptualizing AI Governance in Political and Socioeconomic Contexts

How does the framing of AI governance as a technical issue depoliticize the policy landscape, and what are the ramifications? How can we analyze the politics of AI policymaking in ways that render ideological underpinnings, power asymmetries, hegemonic forms of knowledge generation and use, global inequalities resulting from AI uses, or big tech regulatory capture in AI governance more visible? What are the ideological underpinnings of current AI governance approaches, and how do they reinforce global power asymmetries? How can normative democracy theory, critical political economy, gender studies, or decolonial perspectives contribute to the understanding of AI policymaking?

Global Perspectives: AI Governance in the “Majority World”

How do the “Brussels Effect,” “Washington Effect,” or even “Beijing Effect” shape the forms and substance of global AI governance? How can theory and analysis be built from a “Majority World” (i.e. those countries outside the Northern and Western jurisdictions which dominate the debates) perspective aiming for epistemic justice in the knowledge production on AI governance? How do multinational corporations’ policy practices in standardization fora or government procurement arrangements impact various AI regulatory initiatives? What are drivers and trajectories of the normative interactions between countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America in AI governance, in light of their unique geopolitical contexts? How do colonial legacies influence AI policymaking and tech diplomacy relations?

From Critique to Construction: Building Democratic and Sustainable AI Futures

How can interdisciplinary research on AI governance generate alternative pathways for more democratic and socially just AI futures? How can we understand and address the injustices induced by AI systems in an intersectional way? What theoretical frameworks, methodological choices, and practical strategies can policymakers, civil society, and academics adopt to navigate the growing governance complex of AI governance and ensure equitable AI futures?

Please submit abstracts of 300-500 words, outlining the research question, methodology, empirical research program and expected contribution.

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Session 1 Critical perspectives on AI policy and governance: Experiences from ASEAN, Africa, & India

Friday, July 4th 08:00 to 10:00 (B2)

Discussants

Azadeh Akbari (Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main)

Ching-Fu Lin (National Tsinghua University)

(Virtual) Apotechnosis and the Transformation of Authority in AI Governance

Roy Heidelberg (Louisiana State University)

This paper explores the concept of apotechnosis to critique how artificial intelligence (AI) transforms authority and governance, highlighting the erasure of human agency in favor of algorithmic and procedural control. Coined to contrast with apotheosis, which denotes deification or elevation, apotechnosis captures the reduction of authority into impersonal, technological systems optimized for control. The paper situates this transformation within the broader context of global AI governance, examining how regulatory frameworks and technological advancements perpetuate power asymmetries and depoliticize decision-making.

The development of AI reflects the culmination of bureaucratic rationality, where decision-making authority is displaced from relational human engagement to algorithmic systems. Through mechanisms such as transparency and accountability, AI governance frameworks deepen dependence on these systems, reinforcing their impersonal nature. This dynamic mirrors trends in global governance where regulatory norms shaped by dominant jurisdictions (e.g., the EU, US, and China) impose frameworks that marginalize local values and socio-political contexts, particularly in the Majority World. AI governance thus operates as an extension of bureaucratic logic, privileging efficiency and control over deliberation and plurality.

Drawing on Max Weber's insights into bureaucracy and Carl Schmitt's notion of secularized theological concepts in politics, the paper argues that AI represents a new form of superhuman authority—legitimate precisely because it is not human. The displacement of human judgment and relationality underscores a paradox: efforts to govern AI through procedural frameworks such as transparency and accountability often exacerbate the very systems of control they aim to regulate. This creates a recursive dynamic in which governance tools designed for human oversight depend increasingly on the capabilities of AI itself.

The paper critically examines how this trajectory manifests globally, particularly in the Majority World. It highlights how countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America negotiate or resist imported AI governance norms, raising questions about epistemic justice and the imposition of colonial legacies in global policymaking. These dynamics underscore the limitations of current AI governance models, which fail to address the relational and contextual dimensions of authority in diverse socio-political settings.

By introducing apotechnosis as a conceptual lens, this paper contributes to the study of global AI governance by offering a critique of the technocratic and depoliticized assumptions underpinning regulatory frameworks. It calls for a rethinking of governance that moves beyond the logic of procedural control and algorithmic authority, emphasizing the need to reintegrate human judgment, relationality, and plurality into political life.

(Virtual) When the algorithm becomes an issue: Algorithmic regulation and agenda-setting processes in Colombia

Juan Gutiérrez (Universidad de Los Andes)

In this paper we trace the agenda-setting processes that led to the entry of artificial intelligence (AI) and public algorithms into the regulatory agenda in Colombia. We aim at addressing two main research questions: (1) What factors contribute to explain the entry of issues associated with the development and adoption of AI and public algorithms in the institutional agenda and (2) What factors could have influenced the (non)adoption of algorithmic regulation. This research consists of a case study of regulatory processes in which multiple AI bills were submitted in the Colombian Congress since 2021, but the process did not finalize with the adoption of a law. Given the comparative nature of this research and in line with Weidemann's (2020) approach, we use the multiple streams framework to understand the convergence of factors that influenced the insertion of algorithmic regulation in the institutional agenda of Colombia and Chile. Hence, we assess the factors associated with the problem stream (e.g. focusing events, indicators, feedback), policy stream (e.g. technical feasibility), and the political stream (e.g. elections, national mood, ideology) (Kingdon, 2014). We identify the key stakeholders (including policy entrepreneurs) that participated in political processes, how they attempted to influence the agenda-setting process, and the narratives that these actors have sought to position. We also explore other factors (i.e. media framing, policy windows) that influenced the Colombian State to "pay attention" to algorithmic issues and the regulatory output. Data for this qualitative study was collected from two key sources: semi-structured interviews with key actors who have participated in these processes and documents (official reports, news, and social networks). The information was triangulated and processed using the qualitative methodology of process tracing, which is one that allows examining the processes that contribute to explain multiple relationships of causal factors (independent variables) that an event (dependent variable) may have in the social sciences (Cortez & Solorio, 2022; Ragin, 2009). In this case, the dependent variable would be algorithmic regulation adoption and the independent variables include variables associated with the three streams (problem, politics, policies). In sum, by comparing the agenda-setting processes in Colombia, we attempt to identify the factors, actors and political processes that explain how and why algorithms come to become a matter of public policy and enter the regulatory agenda and why algorithmic regulation was or not adopted.

Just playing or contesting the future of artificial intelligence in the public sector? The politics of making "responsible AI" through regulatory sandbox

Regine Paul (Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Societies, Köln, Germany)

A growing list of scandals around unlawful and discriminatory uses of AI systems by state authorities, as well as untransparent interactions with corporate tech giants, have fueled controversial discussions around the benefits and pitfalls of using AI in public sector decision-making. Prima facie, at least in democratic settings, this would predict political contestation as to the appropriate rules and legal bases for public sector AI uses. This expectation, however, clashes with an omnipresent language of outright consensus around a crucial new arena for scrutinizing and testing public sector AI applications: regulatory sandboxes. Interactions in these regulatory testbeds are dialogue-oriented as they seek to "minimize friction" and establish the "common interests of markets, regulators, and communities" (Just et al. 2023: 14). The sharp contrast between the highly consensual representation of testing AI solutions for the public sector in the seemingly playful environment of sandboxes versus a partially heated academic and public debate about the future of public sector AI technologies is puzzling: Where do disagreement, tensions, or conflict occur with AI sandboxes and through which processes and interactions is potential friction absorbed or otherwise "minimized"?

We explore these questions through an inductive qualitative case study of the Norwegian AI-focused regulatory sandbox, set up in 2021 and lead by the country's Data Protection Authority (DPA) Datatilsynet. As a pioneer in its field with a strong focus on public sector AI applications, the Norwegian case offers insights for Europe as a whole, especially since the European AI Act requires all developers and users of so-called high-risk AI systems to establish regulatory sandboxes from 2026 onwards. Based on a qualitative interpretivist analysis of policy documents (sandbox exit reports and transcripts of sandbox workshops) and semi-structured interviews with sandbox participants, we reconstruct lines of disagreement as well as strategies for minimizing conflict or forging consensus in a full sample of public sector sandbox projects (n=11).

Our findings are threefold. Firstly, conflicts in the projects revolve around the appropriate legal bases for data processing, issues of discrimination and transparency, and the proportionality of collecting citizen data for the purpose at hand. As the mandate of the DPA would predict, questions of power asymmetries

between citizens and authorities are at the margins, while issues of corporate power in the public sector do not feature at all. Secondly, the intensity of conflicts varies depending on the maturity of AI development and the expertise which the DPA ascribes to the project partners, but also by the assumed magnitude of potential fundamental rights violations. Thirdly, the DPA's main strategies for minimizing conflict are a referral to the legal system, opening future legal pathways for data collection and processing, and a strict separation of sandbox guidance from enforcement action. We discuss the implications of these findings for European AI sandboxes and their democratic embedding.

Who wants to be Southeast Asia's data center? Malaysia's socio-technical imaginaries and infrastructured global hierarchies of AI

Stefan Bächtold (Monash University, Malaysia Campus)

With the ubiquitous hype of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, governments across the world scramble to devise policies that regulate the fast-moving technologies' potentials and dangers. What receives less attention in scholarly debates, however, are the material and infrastructural aspects of imagined AI futures. Although AI is often depicted as a virtual technology, imagined AI futures often rely on substantial changes to material, global infrastructures to provide the necessary processing power, energy, or network connectivity.

This paper critically examines the case of Malaysia, where its government and big tech companies push to make the country 'Southeast Asia's data centre'. In 2024, several big tech actors have pledged billions in infrastructural investments in data centres for AI and cloud computing in Malaysia; which are touted to help local industry move up the global value chain. These investments have been framed within a policy discourse that promises techno-utopian progress, development, and jobs by uncritically integrating the country into a global model where technology is developed in Silicon Valley, and then without friction trickles into the rest of the world.

Drawing on the sensitivities of international political sociology and science and technology studies, this paper will unpack the multiple socio-technical imaginaries of AI technologies in Malaysia's policies that enact the country as a regional data centre. Analysing policy documents, press releases, and company statements with a decolonial lens, I aim to emphasise the glossed-over frictions, contingencies, and contradictions among different actors' imaginaries; but also the political implications of the policies they enable.

This involves decentring the underpinning (problematic) idea that imagines Silicon Valley's big tech companies at the centre, and Southeast Asian countries on the (semi-)periphery of global AI infrastructures; but also examining the discursive strategies that gloss over potential negative effects of data centres (energy consumption, pollution, etc) in the name of 'digital transformation' for a computing-intensive AI future.

Deconstructing these imaginaries and policies that shape the material dimensions of AI futures thus not only sheds light on the global power hierarchies inscribed in current AI infrastructure projects; it also explores entry points to imagine alternative, decentralised, or more sustainable AI imaginaries for countries in the Global South.

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Session 2 Critical perspectives on global AI policy and governance

Friday, July 4th 10:15 to 12:15 (B2)

Discussants

Ching-Fu Lin (National Tsinghua University)

Regine Paul (Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Societies, Köln, Germany)

The Brussels Effect and AI Governance: Charting Africa's Path in a Global AI Landscape

Adekemi Omotubora (University of Lagos)

Subhajit Basu (University of Leeds)

In July 2024, the European Union's Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act) became the first comprehensive legal framework for AI regulation, enshrining European leadership in the AI governance race.[1] The Act is poised to reshape global AI governance by exporting European regulatory ideals through the "Brussels Effect".[2] While promoted as a model for responsible AI, this approach risks reinforcing regulatory and epistemic hierarchies that marginalise African priorities and deepen post-colonial dependencies. We argue that regulatory frameworks like the AI Act, designed for advanced economies, often fail to address African nations' developmental, cultural, and technological realities. However, colonial legacies have conditioned legal deference to European systems, perpetuating structural inequalities in AI governance.[3] Using Nigeria as a case study, this paper evaluates the AI Act's risk-based approach and contrasts it with Nigeria's AI governance strategy and the African Union's Continental AI Strategy. The paper highlights the risks of overlooking local priorities and contextual needs by exposing the limitations of adopting externally designed frameworks. It challenges Western-centric paradigms, arguing that African nations must resist regulatory dependency and reclaim agency to transform AI governance into a tool for equity, inclusion, and innovation. The paper proposes a more pluralistic governance framework rooted in human-centred, context-sensitive, and culturally responsive approaches as an alternative model for AI regulation. Finally, it advocates for frameworks that promote sovereignty, enabling African nations to shape AI futures aligned with their distinct priorities and aspirations.

[1] See Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act)

[2] Anu Bradford, *The Brussels Effect: How the European Union Rules the World* (New York, 2020; online edn., Oxford Academic. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190088583.001.0001>; see also Urs Gasser, *An EU Landmark for AI governance* (2023) *Journal of Science*

[3] Adekemi Omotubora and Subhajit Basu, *Decoding and Reimagining AI Governance Beyond Colonial Shadows* (2024) *Political Science and Public Policy* <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803922171.00025>

Deliberation of Policy Choices for Sovereign AI in ASEAN (NEW)

Muhammad Nizam Awang (Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia)

As artificial intelligence (AI) reshapes economies and societies, concerns over digital harms ranging from data privacy violations and algorithmic biases to misinformation and cybersecurity threats are increasingly challenging the interpretation of what constitutes safe, ethical and sustainable adoption of AI. While the global tech powers and regulators in the EU, China, and the United States have taken proactive steps in AI governance, ASEAN's approach remains fragmented, with significant disparities in AI policy maturity among member states. The macro framing of AI governance, as expressed in the ASEAN Guide on (Generative) AI Governance and Ethics, will continue to be principle/ rules-based approach, presenting the region's fluidity in fostering AI-driven innovation while safeguarding public interests. The framing of digital harms in particular will be tricked down into national focus area and risk mitigation strategies in developing, regulating and governing complex and distributed AI systems and value chain. The primary questions it ask: should ASEAN member states be getting ready to build their own sovereign AI strategy to address growing digital vulnerabilities in the region? If yes, how does a unified regional AI governance framework that balances national sovereignty with regional cooperation can be achieved? In addressing this question, this paper evaluates the risks of unchecked AI deployment, including economic dependencies on external AI providers, regulatory gaps, and ethical dilemmas. It will also analyse the implications of sovereign AI for cross-border data governance, cybersecurity, and digital trade. While sovereign AI could be a game changer, this paper argues for interoperable regional policy recommendations, including the development of regional AI regulatory standards, investments in indigenous AI capabilities, and strategic alliances to reduce dependency on foreign-owned technologies. It concludes that a coordinated approach to AI governance will not only mitigate digital harms, but also ensure ASEAN remains a competitive and resilient international actor in the AI-driven future in the global AI fora.

“Frontier Living”: Ecologies of Policies, Infrastructures and Practices for Artificial Intelligence (AI) in India

Preeti Raghunath (University of Sheffield)

This paper presents initial findings and themes from a pilot research study on the socio-ecological implications of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in India. The research objective of the study is to examine policies and practices related to AI and its infrastructures in India, drawing attention to its aspirational value as well as its societal and environmental impacts. I ask two research questions towards realising this objective. The first is on the imaginaries and interpretations of AI, society and ecology as they emerge from diverse policy actors and stakeholders, and how they translate into policymaking. Here I explore their aspirations, criticisms, vision and understanding of the importance attributed to AI as the new tech frontier to enable India's economic development and growth. The second is to explore the implications of AI on material and social infrastructures (eg. land acquisition, water and electricity shortages, environmental clearances and labour laws), especially from the perspectives of public interest or civic technologists, environmentalists and civil society actors.

I conduct a deliberative policy analysis of an initial set of interviews, informal conversations, public statements and reports, to unravel the plural aspirations and visions, contestations and debates that the diverse sets of actors in the development of AI in India experience and articulate. I place these perspectives and experiences in the larger global context of AI development, to highlight compulsions and conundrums encountered by countries in the Global South, such as India. This paper will then outline the scholarly approach of developing and adopting a geosocial standpoint as a sympathetic, normative stance through which one can study developments in AI, its policies, infrastructures and practices. The geosocial standpoint allows us to place trajectories of AI policies, infrastructures and practices in longer histories of international business and technology, highlights euro-american centrality in the setting of global governance objectives and explores who might actually be living “frontier lives” in the context of emerging technologies such as AI. I also end on a hopeful note – riffing off of the excitement, aspirations and determination that my interlocutors shared during the pilot research study.

Digital Development Dilemma: A Critique of AI's Coloniality

Azadeh Akbari (Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main)

While the move towards digital futures seems to be inevitable, there are concerning reports about discrimination, exclusion, injustice, repression and bias backed up by the newest technologies, such as AI-governed systems. Many of these problems are portrayed as unintended outcomes, digital harm, political repression, or planning and design mistakes. This paper explores the historical context of the conceptualisation of technology in the decades of development work and the faith in technological fixes for socio-political problems. It introduces the digital development dilemma as a concept describing the inherent

dilemma carried in the core of digital development programmes: increasing efficiency, inclusion, and participation on the one hand and paving the way for digital repression, consolidation of exclusion, establishment of new forms of technological dependency, and complicating digital self-determination, on the other. The paper highlights recent examples of the increasing engagement of Big Tech companies in digital development within the framework of AI race, and new colonial models of platform-based work.