HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE ERA OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: ETHICS, GOVERNANCE, AND REGULATORY APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT

The rapid proliferation of artificial intelligence technologies — evolving from passive chatbots to increasingly autonomous agents — has created unprecedented challenges for international human rights law and governance frameworks. This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of the legal, ethical, and regulatory dimensions of AI governance, examining how existing instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), apply to emerging challenges posed by AI. Employing doctrinal analysis and case study methodology, the paper examines the ethical foundations of AI governance; privacy and data protection; the human rights implications of AI-enabled surveillance; non-discrimination and algorithmic bias; accountability and transparency in automated decision-making; and comparative global regulatory approaches spanning the European Union, the United States, China, the United Kingdom, and international bodies including the United Nations, UNESCO, the OECD, the G7, and the African Union.

The central finding of this research is that AI's effects are not evenly distributed: systems that advance efficiency and welfare for some populations frequently impose disproportionate harm on others, reproducing and entrenching existing patterns of discrimination and exclusion. Fundamental rights — including privacy, equality, fair trial, freedom of expression, and the presumption of innocence — are being reshaped, for better and for worse, by automated systems whose design, training data, and deployment context are rarely subject to meaningful public scrutiny. The paper argues that mandatory human rights impact assessments, binding international standards, independent enforcement capacity, and meaningful public participation are

Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Legal Research | Licensed under CC BY 4.0 — https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/ | DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.21852435 | Title: Human Rights In The Era Of Artificial Intelligence: Ethics, Governance, And Regulatory Approaches

indispensable to closing the gap between AI's rapid deployment and the law's capacity to protect fundamental rights. It concludes that AI governance frameworks must vary in institutional design according to context, but should converge around binding standards, international cooperation, and robust enforcement if AI is to serve, rather than undermine, human dignity, democratic institutions, and social justice.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, AI Governance, Privacy and Data Protection, AI Surveillance, Automated Decision-Making, Algorithmic Bias, Accountability, Transparency, Human Rights Impact Assessment, International Human Rights Law, UDHR, ICCPR, ECHR, EU AI Act.

I. Introduction

The extensive deployment of artificial intelligence across sectors has outpaced traditional regulatory frameworks. AI systems can enhance efficiency and decision-making, but may equally generate biased, opaque, or inaccurate outcomes: AI-driven hiring, credit scoring, predictive policing, and healthcare systems can inadvertently reinforce discrimination or produce decisions that are difficult to explain or challenge. These dynamics underscore the need for accountability, transparency, and fairness in the development and deployment of AI.

Human rights supply a crucial framework for assessing AI's societal impact. Rights to privacy, equality, non-discrimination, and access to justice must be safeguarded in an era of large-scale data collection and automated decision-making. Existing international human rights instruments remain relevant but require reinterpretation to address novel problems posed by AI — including algorithmic bias, mass surveillance, and the use of automated systems in judicial and administrative processes.

AI governance also raises broader political and ethical questions concerning power, democracy, and social values. Unlike traditional governance mechanisms, algorithmic systems frequently make decisions automatically and at scale, diminishing human oversight and heightening concerns about democratic accountability. The concentration of AI development within a small number of technologically advanced states and firms further complicates international governance, as different jurisdictions prioritise innovation, economic growth, security, or human rights protection to varying degrees.

A further complication lies in the dual-use nature of AI technologies: systems developed for beneficial purposes may equally be misused for surveillance, manipulation, or social control. Governance frameworks must therefore regulate not only intended uses, but foreseeable misuse and long-term societal impact. AI governance requires balancing competing values — innovation against precaution, individual rights against collective welfare, and global standards against local priorities — while also addressing AI's growing influence over democratic processes through political advertising, public administration, and civic engagement, alongside emerging threats of misinformation and electoral manipulation.

The effects of AI are not evenly distributed. A system may generate substantial benefits for one class of persons while imposing significant costs upon another, and bridging the resulting gap between AI development and human rights protection requires sustained research into the human rights and ethical consequences of specific AI applications. Accordingly, the widespread adoption of AI and its far-reaching impact on individuals have intensified concerns across multiple dimensions of human rights — including the rights to life, fair trial, privacy, equality, education, health, liberty, and the presumption of innocence, together with freedom of expression — all of which are being reshaped, for good and ill, by automated systems. This paper does not treat AI as a technology that can be declined or reversed; rather, given its embeddedness in contemporary life, it examines how legal and regulatory frameworks can render AI's deployment consistent with human rights.

This paper proceeds as follows. Part II examines the ethical foundations underpinning AI governance. Part III addresses privacy and data protection. Part IV considers AI-enabled surveillance. Part V examines due process and the rule of law. Part VI addresses non-discrimination and algorithmic bias. Part VII considers economic, social, and cultural rights. Part VIII examines accountability and transparency mechanisms. Part IX surveys international legal frameworks and institutions. Part X undertakes a comparative analysis of national regulatory approaches. Part XI identifies emerging challenges, and Part XII concludes with policy recommendations.

II. Ethical Foundations of Artificial Intelligence

A. Philosophical Frameworks

The ethical evaluation of artificial intelligence draws upon a rich tradition of moral philosophy developed over millennia. From Aristotelian virtue ethics to Kantian deontology, and from utilitarian consequentialism to contemporary theories of distributive justice, each framework offers a distinct lens through which to assess AI's moral significance. Understanding these foundations is essential to constructing coherent governance principles, since differing philosophical starting points can yield divergent conclusions about the same instance of AI conduct.

Utilitarianism, associated with Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, evaluates morality according to the consequences of actions and their tendency to maximise aggregate welfare. Applied to AI, a utilitarian approach assesses morality by examining net welfare outcomes, and has shaped cost-benefit analysis in AI policy. It nonetheless encounters difficulties concerning the distribution of harm, the practical difficulty of aggregate welfare calculation, and the risk that majoritarian reasoning may subordinate minority rights. Rule utilitarianism, which evaluates general rules rather than individual acts, offers a more principled response, though the underlying tension between individual rights and aggregate welfare persists.

Deontological ethics, grounded in Kantian moral philosophy, emphasises duties, rules, and the inherent dignity of persons rather than consequences. Certain AI applications may be impermissible notwithstanding aggregate benefit if they treat persons merely as means — for example, by reducing individuals to data points optimised for a system's objective function without regard to their autonomy. The categorical-imperative test — whether a given practice could be universalised as a rule for all AI development — highlights the case for rights that cannot be traded away for aggregate social gain.

Virtue ethics, with roots in both Aristotelian and Confucian traditions, focuses on the character of decision-makers and institutions rather than on rules or outcomes. It directs attention to the character of those who design and deploy AI systems, and suggests that governance must attend to organisational culture and the cultivation of responsible innovation, rather than mere formal compliance.

Contemporary theories of fairness — notably John Rawls's original position and veil of ignorance, and Amartya Sen's capability approach — supply further tools for evaluating AI's distributive

effects, asking whether AI genuinely expands human capabilities and substantive freedoms rather than merely optimising a narrow metric.

B. Core Principles of Contemporary AI Ethics

Across these philosophical traditions, a convergent set of operational principles has emerged for the governance of AI systems.

Security and privacy require that data be collected, stored, and processed under robust safeguards, including encryption, vulnerability testing, and protection against malicious exploitation. Because AI systems are frequently assembled from components developed by disparate actors, establishing clear lines of responsibility and assurance across the supply chain remains a persistent difficulty.

Accountability requires that those responsible for designing and deploying algorithmic systems bear responsibility for preventing and remedying harm at every stage of development, consistent with the principle that prevention is preferable to remediation after the fact.

Reliability requires that AI systems produce outcomes that are reproducible and consistent, a concern of particular importance where AI is deployed in consequential domains such as healthcare or credit allocation, and that mechanisms exist to detect and correct errors promptly.

Transparency requires that the reasoning behind an AI system's outputs be comprehensible to those it affects — whether a jobseeker, a loan applicant, or a criminal defendant — so that consequential decisions can be understood and, where necessary, challenged.

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Impartiality requires the active mitigation of bias and discrimination in algorithmic design. Because an AI system's outputs are only as sound as the data and design choices underlying them, biased or unrepresentative training data will propagate discriminatory outcomes at scale, particularly through automated surveillance and decision-making systems.

III. Privacy and Data Protection in the Age of AI

A. International Legal Foundations

Article 12 of the UDHR provides that no one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence, nor to attacks upon honour and reputation, and that everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference. Article 17 of the ICCPR elevates this guarantee to a binding treaty obligation, prohibiting arbitrary or unlawful

interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence, and unlawful attacks on honour and reputation, while requiring that domestic law provide effective protection against such interference. Article 8 of the ECHR guarantees respect for private and family life, home, and correspondence as a qualified right, permitting state interference only where prescribed by law, in pursuit of a legitimate aim, and necessary in a democratic society. Articles 7 and 8 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights separately protect private life and personal data, recognising data protection as an autonomous fundamental right distinct from privacy more broadly.

State interference with these guarantees is lawful only where it satisfies a three-part test: it must pursue a legitimate aim (such as national security, public safety, the economic well-being of the country, the prevention of disorder or crime, or the protection of health, morals, or the rights of others); it must have a basis in domestic law that is accessible and foreseeable; and it must be necessary in a democratic society, answering a pressing social need and remaining proportionate to the aim pursued. In S and Marper v United Kingdom (2008) 48 EHRR 50, the European Court of Human Rights (Grand Chamber) held that the United Kingdom's blanket policy of indefinitely retaining the DNA samples, profiles, and fingerprints of persons who had been arrested but never convicted violated Article 8 ECHR — a landmark precedent on the limits of state data retention.

AI systems test these frameworks in unprecedented ways. Contemporary AI models require ingestion of vast, often indiscriminate, collections of personal data scraped from the internet, raising acute questions as to whether meaningful consent can ever be obtained at such scale, whether purpose-limitation principles can be satisfied where training data may serve unforeseen future applications, and whether individuals can meaningfully exercise rights of access, rectification, and erasure once their data is embedded within a model's parameters.

B. Regulatory Frameworks

The EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) remains the most comprehensive attempt to regulate personal data processing by AI. Article 5 establishes principles of lawfulness, fairness, transparency, and data minimisation; Article 6 requires a lawful basis for processing; Article 22 addresses solely automated decision-making, providing a right not to be subject to decisions producing legal or similarly significant effects without human involvement; and Article 25 mandates data protection by design and by default. Beyond the European Union, China's Personal Information Protection Law, Brazil's Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados, India's Digital Personal Data

Protection Act 2023, and the California Consumer Privacy Act/California Privacy Rights Act together create a fragmented and increasingly demanding global compliance landscape; cumulative GDPR fines had exceeded €7.1 billion by January 2026, with more than 2,800 documented penalties recorded since the Regulation took effect in May 2018 ('GDPR Fines Hit €7.1 Billion: Data Privacy Enforcement Trends in 2026' (Kiteworks, 25 March 2026) <https://www.kiteworks.com/gdpr-compliance/gdpr-fines-data-privacy-enforcement-2026/> accessed 4 August 2026, citing DLA Piper, 'GDPR Fines and Data Breach Survey' (January 2026)). India's own compliance framework was fully operationalised only recently: the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology notified the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules 2025 on 13 November 2025, giving practical effect to the 2023 Act through a phased implementation timeline that extends into 2027 and establishing the Data Protection Board of India as the sector's principal enforcement body. This staggered approach illustrates a broader pattern whereby statutory data-protection rights are enacted well in advance of the institutional capacity required to enforce them ('India's Digital Personal Data Protection Regime Takes Effect' (Lexology, 24 November 2025) <https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=2073ac40-628f-4112-81f3-fffdfd4b8858> accessed 4 August 2026).

C. Case Studies

Italy's data protection authority, the Garante, temporarily banned ChatGPT in 2023 after finding that OpenAI had violated the GDPR's transparency and lawful-basis requirements; the resulting €15 million fine was subsequently annulled by a Rome court in March 2026, illustrating the practical difficulty of enforcement even where a violation has been established. More acutely, the "Grok" controversy of January 2026 — in which xAI's chatbot was found generating non-consensual sexualised images of real individuals — engaged both data protection and criminal law, prompting investigations by the UK Information Commissioner's Office and French prosecutors, and a parallel Canadian inquiry raising questions of contextual integrity: whether information voluntarily shared for one purpose retains privacy protection when repurposed to train or operate a generative AI system. In May 2026, Amnesty International concluded that generative AI systems built on indiscriminate scraping of personal data are, in important respects, fundamentally incompatible with international human rights law.

IV. Human Rights Implications of AI Surveillance

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A. Legal Framework

AI-enabled surveillance engages rights extending well beyond privacy: the rights to liberty and security of person (UDHR art. 3); freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention (UDHR/ICCPR art. 9); freedom of movement (UDHR art. 13); freedom of thought and conscience (UDHR art. 18); freedom of expression (UDHR/ICCPR art. 19); and freedom of peaceful assembly (UDHR art. 20). The ICCPR additionally guarantees binding non-discrimination protection under Article 26. The European Court of Human Rights requires that any surveillance interference be lawful, pursue a legitimate aim, and be necessary in a democratic society, and the UN Human Rights Council has called for a moratorium on forms of AI surveillance that pose serious risks to human rights pending adequate safeguards.

B. Facial Recognition Technology

The human cost of erroneous facial recognition is illustrated starkly by the case of Angela Lipps, a Tennessee grandmother who, in December 2025, was released after five months' incarceration once it emerged that facial recognition technology had misidentified her as a fraud suspect in a state she had never visited; she had reportedly been arrested at gunpoint while caring for her grandchildren. The case engages both the right to liberty under UDHR/ICCPR Article 9 and non-discrimination principles, given well-documented racial disparities in the accuracy of facial recognition systems across demographic groups. In the United Kingdom, London's Metropolitan Police deployment of live facial recognition in Croydon in 2026 drew criticism over racial bias and inadequate procedural safeguards; Professor Karen Yeung has argued that government actors routinely deploy such technology without proper regard for the legal constraints that bind the exercise of state power. A comparable controversy unfolded in India in July 2026, when the Delhi Police deployed facial recognition-enabled surveillance vans at the Jantar Mantar protest site during a nationwide student agitation; a public interest litigation filed before the Delhi High Court by former student union leader Aishe Ghosh alleged that the continuous, indiscriminate filming of demonstrators violated their fundamental rights to privacy, dignity, and peaceful assembly. Digital rights groups have observed that no dedicated statutory framework currently governs the police use of facial recognition technology in India, leaving affected persons with limited avenues to challenge its deployment ('Explained: Delhi Police's AI Surveillance Network and Why It's Under Scrutiny' (The News Minute, 22 July 2026) <https://www.thenewsminute.com/news/explained-delhi-polices-ai-surveillance-network-and-why-its-under-scrutiny> accessed 4 August 2026).

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C. Predictive Policing

Predictive policing systems risk operationalising historical policing bias into present and future enforcement patterns, creating self-reinforcing cycles of discriminatory targeting. In India, Delhi Police have purchased facial recognition technology from firms linked to the surveillance of human rights activists, raising concerns distinct from — but related to — accuracy-based critiques. The Internet Freedom Foundation has separately reported that Delhi Police treat a facial-similarity score of eighty percent or above as a positive match, a threshold that, when applied to a crowd rather than a single suspect, is liable to generate a disproportionately large number of false positives; the organisation has also noted the absence of any specific departmental rule governing the conditions under which such technology may be deployed against protesters ('AI on the Streets: India's Protest Surveillance Sparks Backlash' (RT, 30 July 2026) <https://www.rt.com/india/643634-ai-surveillance-india-protest/> accessed 4 August 2026). The American Civil Liberties Union warned in 2026 that the convergence of facial recognition, predictive policing, and data fusion, absent adequate legal safeguards, risks producing a "digital police state," while the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights stated in April 2026 that the misuse of AI in law enforcement poses serious human rights risks in the absence of adequate governing frameworks.

V. Due Process, Fair Trial, and the Rule of Law

The right to a fair trial, guaranteed under Article 14 of the ICCPR and Article 6 of the ECHR, is challenged by the deployment of risk-assessment algorithms in judicial contexts. In State v Loomis, 881 N.W.2d 749 (Wis. 2016), the Wisconsin Supreme Court held that the COMPAS recidivism-risk tool could inform, but not exclusively determine, a sentencing decision. Evolving European Court of Human Rights jurisprudence suggests that Article 6 requires a meaningful opportunity to challenge algorithmic evidence presented against a defendant. In the Netherlands, a court held in the SyRI case (Rb. Den Haag 5 februari 2020, ECLI:NL:RBDHA:2020:1878) that a government fraud-detection algorithm, the System Risk Indication system, violated Article 8 ECHR by disproportionately targeting low-income and immigrant communities without adequate transparency or safeguards — a decision that has since assumed landmark status in European algorithmic-accountability jurisprudence. Administrative AI decision-making in welfare,

immigration, and benefits assessment similarly requires effective remedies under Article 2(3) of the ICCPR.

The rule of law itself faces distinctive challenges from gaps in AI governance. Where consequential decisions affecting individual rights and interests are made by systems that are opaque, difficult to contest, and lacking clear lines of accountability, core rule-of-law values — legal certainty, legality, and access to justice — are placed under strain. Effective AI governance must ensure that the deployment of automated systems in public administration does not create zones of practical unaccountability in which conventional legal safeguards cease to operate meaningfully.

VI. Non-Discrimination and Algorithmic Bias

A December 2023 Stanford University study published in Nature Medicine found that several widely used large language models, including those developed by OpenAI, Google, and Anthropic, reproduced discredited race-based medical claims when prompted with clinical scenarios, underscoring the centrality of fairness as a governance concern (Malia Mendez, 'AI Models Propagate False Race-Based Medical Information, Stanford Researchers Find' The Stanford Daily (Stanford, 7 December 2023) <https://stanforddaily.com/2023/12/07/ai-models-propagate-false-race-based-medical-information-stanford-researchers-find/> accessed 4 August 2026).

Algorithmic bias arises from systematic and repeatable errors in automated systems that produce unfair or discriminatory outcomes, disproportionately advantaging some groups over others. Although algorithmic outputs are often perceived as objective and purely data-driven, they are in fact socio-technical constructs shaped by human design choices, institutional norms, and historically accumulated data. Bias in AI rarely emerges as an error occurring in a vacuum; rather, it typically reflects the design assumptions of developers, and can be traced to at least three principal sources: data bias, arising from unrepresentative or historically skewed training data; design bias, arising from the choices developers make regarding model architecture, objective functions, and evaluation metrics; and feedback-loop effects, whereby biased outputs generate further biased data that reinforces the original distortion over time.

Several documented cases illustrate these dynamics. India's Aadhaar biometric verification system, although designed to streamline welfare delivery, has faced sustained criticism for excluding

substantial numbers of intended beneficiaries: errors in fingerprint or iris scans disproportionately affect manual labourers, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities — populations often already marginalised — and field research indicates that such technical failures can amount to a de facto denial of social and economic rights. This concern was echoed by India's Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee, which found in 2025 that high rates of biometric authentication failure continue to exclude eligible beneficiaries from the Public Distribution System and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, attributing the problem in large part to worn fingerprints among manual labourers and altered iris patterns among elderly citizens ('High Rates of Aadhaar Biometric Verification Failure Leads to UIDAI Scrutiny' (Biometric Update, 18 July 2025) <https://www.biometricupdate.com/202507/high-rates-of-aadhaar-biometric-verification-failure-leads-to-uidai-scrutiny> accessed 4 August 2026). In the United States, the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS) tool, used to assess recidivism risk, was found by a 2016 ProPublica investigation to rate Black defendants as high-risk at substantially higher rates than white defendants with comparable profiles, triggering widespread concern regarding the use of opaque AI systems in bail and sentencing decisions. In 2018, Amazon discontinued an experimental AI recruitment tool after discovering that it systematically downgraded résumés containing the word "women's" (for example, "women's chess club") and penalised graduates of women's colleges — a consequence of having been trained on historical hiring data that reflected the company's male-dominated workforce, and which the model consequently reproduced at scale.

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These examples underline that algorithmic outcomes are not naturally occurring but are the product of design choices made without adequate safeguards, and that such systems can function as instruments that reinforce, rather than remedy, existing social hierarchies. In societies such as India, where structural inequality along lines of caste, gender, disability, and religion already shapes access to opportunity, AI-driven bias risks compounding existing injustice under a veneer of technological objectivity.

The multi-dimensional character of AI-related human rights harm deserves particular attention. Individuals belonging to multiple marginalised groups often experience compounded algorithmic discrimination exceeding the sum of its constituent parts: a Black woman, for instance, may experience discrimination from a facial-recognition system that neither Black men nor white

women experience to the same degree — as demonstrated by Joy Buolamwini and Timnit Gebru's foundational research on accuracy disparities in facial recognition across gender and racial categories. Effective governance should adopt an intersectional analytical framework capable of capturing these compounded effects rather than treating each axis of discrimination in isolation.

Children and young persons warrant particular consideration in AI governance. Children's developmental vulnerability, susceptibility to manipulation, and limited capacity for informed consent create heightened obligations for AI systems that interact with or affect them. UNICEF's 2021 Policy Guidance on AI for Children establishes nine requirements, including supporting children's development, ensuring inclusion, protecting personal data, and preserving meaningful human oversight; the United Kingdom's Age Appropriate Design Code and comparable frameworks similarly reflect the premise that heightened protections are warranted for especially vulnerable populations.

Indigenous peoples' rights raise distinct considerations for AI governance built on predominantly Western epistemic foundations. The Indigenous Data Sovereignty movement affirms the right of Indigenous communities to control the collection, ownership, and use of data concerning their peoples, lands, and resources. AI systems trained on Indigenous knowledge or deployed within Indigenous territories must respect collective rights to self-governance and cultural integrity as recognised in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) — a reminder of the limits of a purely individualistic rights framework and the importance of collective dimensions of AI governance.

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VII. Promoting Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

Economic and social rights under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) face both opportunities and risks from AI. The right to work (arts. 6–7) is challenged by the prospect of large-scale displacement of both routine and increasingly non-routine labour, prompting the International Labour Organization to emphasise principles of "just transition." The right to health (art. 12) may benefit from AI-enabled diagnostics and resource allocation, while simultaneously risking the emergence of two-tier health systems stratified by access to AI-enhanced care. The right to education (art. 13) may be advanced through personalised learning technologies, but is threatened by unequal access to computational infrastructure and by biases embedded in training data drawn from unrepresentative student populations. The UN

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has begun to scrutinise these consequences systematically.

The right to participate in cultural life and to benefit from scientific progress (ICESCR art. 15) assumes novel dimensions in the AI era, raising questions as to how AI systems should respect and preserve cultural diversity, and how intellectual property frameworks should adapt to AI-generated works. The concentration of AI development within a small number of countries and firms raises further concerns regarding equitable access to the benefits of technological progress, echoing long-standing debates over technology transfer and the right to development.

VIII. Accountability and Transparency in Automated Decision-Making

A. Legal Requirements

GDPR Articles 13–15 guarantee rights to information concerning automated decision-making, while Article 22 provides a right not to be subject to solely automated decisions producing legal or similarly significant effects, together with rights to human intervention and to contest such decisions. The EU AI Act expands these requirements through Article 13 (transparency obligations for high-risk AI systems), Article 14 (human oversight), and Article 52 (disclosure obligations for chatbots and AI-generated or manipulated media). In the United States, the Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights articulates principles of notice, explanation, and access to human alternatives, while the NIST AI Risk Management Framework structures accountability through the Govern, Map, Measure, and Manage functions.

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B. The Black-Box Problem

The opacity inherent to deep learning architectures structurally impedes transparency. Empirical research on deployed AI systems consistently identifies poor-quality or unrepresentative training data as a leading cause of documented failures, alongside persistent evidence of bias in a substantial share of deployed systems, although the precise incidence varies considerably across studies and sectors. "Automation bias" — the tendency of human decision-makers to defer to algorithmic conclusions over their own judgment — compounds these concerns, particularly in high-stakes contexts such as criminal sentencing. Post-hoc explanation techniques such as LIME and SHAP offer partial solutions, though they have been criticised for failing to faithfully represent a model's actual internal reasoning; the appropriate level of transparency required in a given

context depends on the stakes involved and the needs of the particular audience — a regulator, an affected individual, or an independent auditor — seeking an explanation.

C. The Governance Gap

Notwithstanding growth in dedicated AI governance roles, the Stanford AI Index (2026) reports that 59 percent of organisations cite knowledge gaps, 48 percent cite budget constraints, and 41 percent cite regulatory uncertainty as obstacles to effective AI governance. This suggests that even well-intentioned organisations struggle to translate governance principles into operational practice, a difficulty compounded by the rapid pace of technological change, which perpetually threatens to outstrip regulatory capacity.

D. Auditing and Impact Assessment

Algorithmic auditing is essential to verifying the fairness and reliability of deployed systems, and may take the form of internal, second-party, third-party, or regulatory audits, employing methodologies ranging from narrow technical performance evaluation to holistic socio-technical assessment. Several jurisdictions, including Canada and the United States, have begun to develop statutory frameworks mandating systematic algorithmic evaluation. Persistent challenges include auditors' limited access to proprietary models, the absence of standardised methodology, questions of auditor qualification and independence, disputes over the appropriate scope of an audit, and the difficulty of capturing a system's behaviour over time as it is retrained or updated; standards bodies including ISO, IEEE, and NIST are progressively supplying structure to this emerging practice.

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E. The Right to Explanation and Civil Society Oversight

The right to an explanation of automated decisions protects affected individuals by enabling both individual empowerment and systemic accountability. GDPR Article 22 establishes a right in connection with solely automated decisions that produce significant effects, and the Council of Europe's Framework Convention on AI further elaborates the possibility of challenging AI-assisted decisions, requiring accessible complaint procedures, meaningful human review, and adequate remedies.

Accountability is further sustained by informal oversight from employees, researchers, journalists, and civil society organisations. The EU AI Act includes whistleblower protections, reflecting the recognition that external scrutiny is often indispensable to exposing algorithmic harms that internal governance structures fail to catch; investigative journalism has, in practice, exposed algorithmic

harms in criminal justice, healthcare, social media, and government services, underscoring the continuing importance of protecting those who bring such harms to light.

IX. International Legal Frameworks and Institutions

A. The United Nations System

The United Nations has increasingly treated AI governance as an international priority. The Secretary-General's Roadmap for Digital Cooperation (2020) identified AI governance as requiring enhanced international coordination, and the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Body on AI issued recommendations in 2023 that have informed subsequent UN engagement with AI governance. In March 2024, the UN General Assembly adopted its first resolution on AI, calling for safe, secure, and trustworthy AI that respects human rights, followed by a second resolution addressing AI capacity-building for sustainable development in developing countries.

UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, adopted in November 2021, constitutes the first global normative instrument on AI ethics, adopted by all 193 UNESCO member states. Through this instrument, UNESCO has articulated principles including proportionality, safety, fairness, privacy, sustainability, human oversight, transparency, and accountability, and has developed assessment methodologies to assist states in evaluating their AI governance frameworks against human rights standards, spanning the domains of education, culture, health, the economy, and the environment.

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The UN Human Rights Council adopted Resolution 47/23 (2021) on the right to privacy in the digital age and Resolution 51/22 (2022) on the promotion, protection, and enjoyment of human rights in relation to digital technologies. The UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and opinion has separately addressed the implications of AI for freedom of expression and privacy, while the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination issued General Recommendation No. 36 (2020) on the prevention and combating of racial profiling by law enforcement, addressing algorithmic dimensions of the practice. The International Telecommunication Union has linked AI governance to the Sustainable Development Goals, and the World Health Organization published guidance on the ethics and governance of AI for health in 2021.

The UN Global Digital Compact (2023) commits to establishing an international scientific panel on AI, modelled on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to provide regular assessments of AI capability, risk, and governance needs. The International Labour Organization examines AI's impact on decent work and just transitions, the World Trade Organization has initiated discussions on AI and trade policy, and the World Intellectual Property Organization addresses questions of AI and intellectual property. UNICEF has issued policy guidance on AI and children's rights. Collectively, this dense network of UN system activity reflects growing recognition that AI governance requires coordinated, multi-agency responses across the international system.

B. The Council of Europe Framework Convention on AI (2024)

The Council of Europe's Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, adopted in May 2024, is the first legally binding international treaty on AI governance. Notably, the Convention encourages states to extend its protections to AI use by private-sector actors, not merely public authorities. Its key obligations include mandatory human rights impact assessments, transparency requirements — including a right to know when one is interacting with an AI system — accountability mechanisms providing effective remedies, and requirements of meaningful human oversight; the Convention further requires states to establish national supervisory authorities responsible for protecting affected persons. The Convention builds upon earlier Council of Europe instruments, including the Venice Commission's report on the rule of law and AI, Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2020) on the human rights impacts of algorithmic systems, and the 2019 Declaration on the manipulative capabilities of algorithmic processes, and draws upon European Court of Human Rights jurisprudence, including Bărbulescu v Romania (2017) and Big Brother Watch v United Kingdom (2021). Because the Convention is open to accession by non-Council of Europe states, it has the potential to achieve genuinely global reach.

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C. OECD AI Principles and Governance Framework

The OECD's values-based AI Principles, adopted in May 2019 as the first intergovernmental standard on AI and subsequently endorsed by the G20, articulate five core principles: inclusive growth and well-being; human-centred values and fairness; transparency and explainability; robustness, security, and safety; and accountability. The OECD's classification framework, which

categorises AI systems according to data, context, model, task, and actors, was updated in 2024 to address general-purpose AI and foundation models. These principles have proved influential in shaping national AI strategies and in establishing a shared international vocabulary for AI governance.

D. The G7, G20, and Related Summit Processes

The G7 Hiroshima AI Process (2023) produced a code of conduct and guiding principles for advanced AI development. The Bletchley Park AI Safety Summit (November 2023) produced the Bletchley Declaration, signed by 28 countries and the European Union, marking a significant moment of international convergence on frontier AI safety. The Seoul Summit (2024) produced the Frontier AI Safety Commitments, under which participating companies pledged specific safety practices. The G20 adopted AI principles in 2019, subsequently reaffirmed at summits held in India (2023) and Brazil (2024).

E. The African Union and Regional Frameworks

The African Union's Continental AI Strategy (2024), building on the AU's Digital Transformation Strategy (2020–2030), emphasises data sovereignty, the development of local capacity, and the reflection of African values in AI governance, while addressing risks of "digital colonialism." The Malabo Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (2014) provides data-protection foundations for the region, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has recognised the collective dimension of rights relevant to AI governance in the African context. The Smart Africa initiative, encompassing more than 30 countries, seeks to promote ethical development and local innovation in AI across the continent.

X. Comparative Regulatory Approaches

A. The European Union

The EU AI Act (2024), the first comprehensive AI-specific legislation of its kind, adopts a risk-based, tiered regulatory approach: certain practices (such as social scoring and specified forms of biometric surveillance) are prohibited outright; "high-risk" systems — including those deployed in law enforcement, employment, and education — are subject to extensive obligations concerning risk management, data governance, and human oversight; "limited-risk" systems are subject to transparency obligations; and "minimal-risk" systems remain subject only to voluntary codes of conduct. The AI Act complements the GDPR, the Data Governance Act, the Digital Services Act,

and the Digital Markets Act within a broader architecture of EU digital regulation, reflecting a precautionary approach that accepts some cost to innovation in exchange for stronger rights protection.

B. The United States

The United States has adopted a predominantly centralised, executive-led approach rather than comprehensive federal legislation, directing agencies to develop sector-specific safety standards, protect privacy, advance equity, and promote innovation. The Federal Trade Commission addresses AI-enabled discrimination and deceptive practices; the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission addresses algorithmic bias in employment; the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau addresses algorithmic bias in lending; and the National Institute of Standards and Technology issued voluntary risk-management guidance in 2023, while the Food and Drug Administration regulates AI-enabled medical devices. Certain states have pursued their own legislative frameworks, including the Colorado AI Act (2024), the Illinois AI Video Interview Act, and multiple California proposals including SB 1047. The non-binding Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights (2022) articulates principles without legal force, while the National AI Initiative Act (2020) seeks to coordinate the federal research and development ecosystem. Growing calls for comprehensive federal legislation reflect concern that the current sectoral approach produces inefficiency and inconsistency, particularly given AI's cross-cutting character, which transcends the jurisdictional boundaries of individual agencies.

C. China

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China has pursued comprehensive, state-directed, algorithm-specific regulation, including the Algorithmic Recommendation Management Provisions (2022), which impose transparency requirements on recommendation systems; the Deep Synthesis Provisions (2023), aimed at preventing the malicious use of deepfake technology; and the Generative AI Measures (2023), which impose requirements on training data and generated content. China's approach reflects distinctive priorities of social stability, state security, and content control alongside innovation, and, notwithstanding the tension between algorithmic governance and pervasive state surveillance, China has participated actively in the development of global technical standards for AI.

D. The United Kingdom and Other National Approaches

The United Kingdom has adopted a principles-based approach organised around safety, transparency, fairness, accountability, and contestability, implemented by existing sectoral regulators rather than a single AI-specific statute. Having hosted the Bletchley Park summit and established an AI Safety Institute, the UK has sought to establish international leadership on frontier AI safety specifically, while pursuing a lighter-touch domestic regulatory posture. Australia has developed high-risk use-case guidelines; South Korea's AI Framework Act (2024) establishes a national AI Commission; and Japan has emphasised an "agile governance" model favouring iterative, adaptive regulation over fixed rules. This diversity of national legislative approaches reflects differing attempts to balance innovation, rights protection, and industrial policy.

E. India

India illustrates a further distinct regulatory trajectory: rather than enacting a single AI-specific statute, the government has pursued a principle-based, sectorally distributed approach anchored in the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's India AI Governance Guidelines, unveiled in November 2025 under the IndiaAI Mission and organised around a 'do no harm' philosophy that favours risk-tiered, proportionate obligations over rigid ex ante rules. This framework operates alongside the Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 and its 2025 Rules, and is coordinated across the Ministry, NITI Aayog, and sectoral regulators such as the Reserve Bank of India, reflecting a deliberate institutional choice to diffuse AI oversight across existing regulatory bodies rather than to create a dedicated AI regulator. Commentators have observed that this deployment-first posture, while intended to preserve regulatory flexibility for a fast-growing digital economy, leaves open the question of how enforceable individual remedies will be in the absence of a standalone AI statute comparable to the EU AI Act ('Do No Harm, Do More Good: India's Framework for Responsible AI Growth' (Truyo, 13 November 2025) <https://truyo.com/do-no-harm-do-more-good-indias-framework-for-responsible-ai-growth/> accessed 4 August 2026).

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Taken together, these regulatory approaches reflect deeper philosophical disagreement concerning the appropriate relationship between the state, markets, and the individual in the governance of technology. The EU's approach embodies precautionary principles and accepts potential costs to innovation in exchange for stronger rights protection; the US approach prioritises market

dynamism and technological leadership, accepting higher levels of individual risk in exchange for the benefits of rapid innovation; China's approach prioritises social stability and technological supremacy; and the UK's post-Brexit approach seeks to position itself between EU precaution and US permissiveness, pursuing competitive advantage through regulatory agility.

E. Jurisdictional Challenges and Accountability Deficits

AI systems operate across borders through global datasets, shared infrastructure, and cloud computing, generating multi-jurisdictional consequences. Regulatory fragmentation raises compliance costs and complicates enforcement; mechanisms including mutual recognition arrangements, equivalence determinations, international conventions, and the "Brussels Effect" — whereby EU regulatory standards become de facto global standards through market power — promote a degree of convergence, though geopolitical rivalry between more liberal-democratic and more authoritarian governance models continues to constrain full harmonisation. Companies operating across jurisdictions with markedly different value systems face compliance challenges requiring sophisticated regulatory strategy.

Current liability frameworks struggle to allocate accountability across complex AI value chains involving developers, data providers, integrators, deployers, and end users; traditional tort concepts of foreseeability, causation, and fault apply awkwardly to opaque algorithmic processes. The EU's proposed AI Liability Directive addresses some of these gaps through rebuttable presumptions of causation and disclosure obligations. Power concentration among a small number of dominant firms raises distinct governance risks, while the global North–South divide raises concerns of governance injustice, underscoring the need for capacity-building, technology transfer, and the meaningful inclusion of developing economies in the design of emerging AI governance frameworks.

The role of voluntary industry self-regulation remains contested: proponents argue that industry possesses superior technical knowledge, can respond more quickly than legislative processes, and has commercial incentives to preserve public trust; critics counter that voluntary commitments lack enforceability, create accountability gaps, may function principally as a public-relations strategy to forestall binding regulation, and cannot adequately address the underlying power asymmetries between AI developers and affected populations. The experience of social media self-

regulation — widely regarded as insufficient to address well-documented platform harms — offers a cautionary precedent for AI governance premised primarily on voluntary mechanisms.

XI. Current Challenges and Emerging Issues

A. Deepfakes and Democratic Integrity

Generative AI presents novel challenges to freedom of expression, including the creation of convincing digital manipulations ("deepfakes") capable of undermining trust in genuine information, the potential for AI-generated disinformation at scale, and unresolved questions concerning the extent to which speech protections should extend to algorithmically generated content. World Economic Forum analysis (2026) found that nearly all explicit deepfake videos in circulation are non-consensual, with approximately 99 percent targeting women, while politically motivated deepfakes pose a direct threat to electoral integrity. The EU AI Act, fully effective from August 2026, mandates the labelling of AI-generated media, though the practical effectiveness of enforcement mechanisms remains untested. India has taken a comparable step through amendments to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, notified by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology on 10 February 2026 and effective from 20 February 2026, which require intermediaries to label 'synthetically generated information' with permanent, non-removable identifiers and, for visual content, a visible label covering at least ten percent of the display area throughout the duration of the content. The amendment further compresses the timeframe within which platforms must act on flagged synthetic content, on pain of losing the safe-harbour protection ordinarily available to intermediaries under Indian law ('India's IT Amendment Rules 2026 Explained: How the New Law Regulates Deepfakes and AI-Generated Content' (The Legal Hubb, 2026) <https://thelegalhubb.com/indias-it-amendment-rules-2026-explained-how-the-new-law-regulates-deepfakes-and-ai-generated-content/> accessed 4 August 2026). A number of jurisdictions have enacted or proposed legislation addressing digital manipulation specifically, while international bodies including UNESCO have issued guidance on AI and ethical journalism; the underlying tension between combating harmful AI-generated content and preserving legitimate expression remains substantially unresolved.

B. The AI Regulation Trilemma

Harvard Kennedy School researchers identified in 2026 a structural "trilemma" confronting AI governance: governance reach, rights commitment, and technological capability cannot simultaneously be maximised. Governance capacity exercised without a genuine rights commitment risks producing repression; technological development pursued without governance capacity risks producing unaccountable systems; and a strong rights commitment pursued without adequate governance capacity risks producing aspirational but practically unenforceable frameworks. This trilemma helps explain the divergent regulatory trajectories surveyed in Part X.

C. Enforcement Gaps

The annulment of Italy's €15 million fine against OpenAI in March 2026 illustrates the practical fragility of enforcement even under a mature regulatory regime such as the GDPR. Further EU AI Act compliance deadlines — prohibited practices from February 2025, and the bulk of high-risk system requirements from August 2026 — will test whether regulators possess the technical expertise and institutional will necessary for meaningful enforcement at scale.

D. The Fundamental Compatibility Debate

Amnesty International's May 2026 conclusion that certain generative AI applications are "fundamentally incompatible" with international human rights law — not merely requiring additional safeguards, but structurally incapable of rights-compliant operation — represents one of the most consequential emerging questions in this field. Whether the international community moves toward outright prohibition of certain AI applications, mandatory human rights impact assessment as a precondition of deployment, or continued reliance on market-based compliance mechanisms will substantially shape the trajectory of AI and human rights for decades to come.

E. AI Alignment and Emerging Capabilities

The governance of emerging and advanced AI capabilities presents a distinct challenge to conventional regulatory design. As AI systems continue to advance, they may exhibit capabilities neither anticipated by their developers nor foreseen by regulators — potentially including strategic deception, increasingly autonomous goal-directed behaviour, and the capacity to circumvent established safety mechanisms. Regulating systems whose capabilities are uncertain or rapidly evolving requires governance strategies that differ substantially from those developed for systems with clearly defined functions and predictable operational limits. Consequently, "AI alignment" — ensuring that AI systems reliably operate in accordance with human intentions, ethical

principles, and societal values — has emerged as a central concern of AI safety and governance research.

F. Environmental Sustainability

Environmental sustainability has become an increasingly salient dimension of AI governance. The training of large-scale AI models demands substantial computational resources, generating significant energy consumption and associated carbon emissions. The environmental costs of AI must therefore be weighed against its potential environmental benefits, including applications in climate modelling, environmental monitoring, and resource optimisation. Effective governance frameworks should integrate sustainability principles, including mandatory energy-efficiency reporting, environmental impact assessment, and incentives for the development of more resource-efficient AI systems; the EU's broader digital policy architecture offers a preliminary model for integrating environmental sustainability considerations into AI-specific regulation.

XII. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has demonstrated that AI technologies engage virtually the full spectrum of internationally protected human rights: privacy (UDHR art. 12; ICCPR art. 17; ECHR art. 8); freedom from arbitrary detention (UDHR/ICCPR art. 9); non-discrimination (UDHR arts. 1–2, 7; ICCPR art. 26); freedom of expression and assembly (UDHR arts. 19–20; ICCPR arts. 19, 21); and the right to a fair trial (ICCPR art. 14). No existing regulatory model — whether the European Union's precautionary, rights-based framework, the United States' innovation-first sectoral approach, or China's state-directed model — has achieved an optimal balance between innovation and rights protection, and each embodies a distinct set of trade-offs shaped by underlying political and social values.

Future AI governance should embrace adaptive and responsive regulatory design capable of evolving alongside rapid technological change without sacrificing legal certainty or democratic accountability. Rather than relying exclusively on fixed rules, policymakers should articulate stable ethical principles supported by flexible implementation mechanisms — including regulatory sandboxes, periodic reviews, mandatory impact assessments, and structured technology forecasting — enabling governments to respond effectively to emerging AI issues while continuing to encourage responsible innovation.

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Because AI operates across national borders, effective governance further requires robust international cooperation. Organisations such as the United Nations, UNESCO, the OECD, and the Council of Europe should continue to promote interoperability between national regulatory frameworks, mutual recognition of conformity assessments, shared technical standards, coordinated enforcement, and collective capacity-building — including through an international AI incident-reporting system analogous to aviation safety reporting, shared databases of AI-related harms and near-misses, and joint research programmes on AI safety and governance.

Human rights should remain the foundational framework for AI governance, offering universally recognised standards for the protection of individual freedom and dignity. States should strengthen legal frameworks, empower national human rights institutions, and ensure the meaningful participation of affected communities — including children, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups — in AI policymaking. Individuals should possess enforceable rights to transparency, explanation, contestation, and effective remedy where AI systems cause harm.

The growing concentration of AI capability within a small number of firms raises distinct concerns for competition, innovation, and democratic oversight. Governments should strengthen competition enforcement to address market concentration, invest in public AI research infrastructure, promote equitable data governance, and encourage open-source AI development; participatory mechanisms — including citizens' assemblies, public consultations, and community-based data governance — can help ensure that AI development reflects diverse societal values and serves the broader public interest, rather than the interests of a narrow set of dominant actors.

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Based on this analysis, this paper offers the following recommendations: first, states should ratify the Council of Europe Framework Convention on AI, establishing binding international minimum standards; second, mandatory human rights impact assessments should precede the deployment of high-risk AI systems, particularly in law enforcement and public administration; third, effective enforcement bodies must be resourced with sufficient technical expertise and sanctioning authority; fourth, a moratorium on live facial recognition in public spaces should apply pending independently verified safeguards; fifth, international cooperation should be strengthened through harmonised standards and joint enforcement mechanisms; and sixth, transparency requirements must be operationalised through concrete technical standards and genuinely accessible complaint mechanisms. Investment in regulatory capacity, meaningful participation of civil society and

developing countries, protection for whistleblowers and investigative journalists, competition policy addressing AI market concentration, international cooperation on safety research and incident reporting, public digital literacy, and specific protections for children and other vulnerable groups should all be treated as integral, rather than peripheral, components of a rights-respecting AI governance agenda.

The governance of artificial intelligence represents one of the defining human rights challenges of the present era. The frameworks established now will determine whether AI advances human dignity or entrenches surveillance, discrimination, and unaccountable power. International human rights law supplies the necessary normative foundation for this task — but only if applied with rigour, and with genuine commitment to the primacy of human rights over competing commercial and security imperatives.

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