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Governing Data, Governing People:

A Socio-Legal Analysis of Digital Sovereignty and Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

The increasing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into governance structures has fundamentally reshaped the relationship between data, power, and society. The concept of digital sovereignty—understood as the authority of states to control data flows, digital infrastructures, and technological ecosystems within their jurisdiction—has emerged as a central framework in this transformation. While often justified in terms of national security, economic growth, and regulatory autonomy, digital sovereignty also raises critical socio-legal concerns about surveillance, autonomy, and the redistribution of power in the digital age.

This paper explores how the governance of data increasingly translates into the governance of people. AI-driven systems, fuelled by massive data collection, enable both state and corporate actors to monitor behavior, predict actions, and influence decision-making processes. Such developments contribute to new forms of social control that operate subtly through algorithmic regulation rather than overt coercion. By adopting a socio-legal approach, this study examines how legal frameworks relating to data protection, privacy, and emerging AI regulations interact with social realities, often reinforcing existing inequalities and exclusions.

The paper further interrogates the tension between national assertions of digital sovereignty and the inherently transnational nature of digital technologies. It questions whether existing legal regimes are adequately equipped to address issues such as cross-border data flows, platform dominance, and accountability in algorithmic governance. Additionally, it highlights the risk that

the pursuit of digital sovereignty may legitimize intrusive surveillance practices, potentially undermining fundamental rights and democratic values.

By situating these developments within broader debates on law, technology, and society, the paper argues for a more balanced and rights-oriented approach to digital governance. It emphasizes the need for transparency, accountability, and inclusive regulatory frameworks to ensure that the control of data does not translate into the unchecked control of individuals in AI-driven societies.

Keywords

Digital Sovereignty, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Data Governance, Social Control, Algorithmic Regulation