

Algorithmic Statecraft: China's AI-Driven Model of Governance and Its Global Impact

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ABSTRACT: The rapid growth of artificial intelligence (AI) has ushered in a new era of governance, with China leading the charge in algorithmic statecraft. China's approach to AI-driven governance blends extensive surveillance, big data analysis, and predictive technologies to bolster state control and ensure social stability. While numerous studies delve into digital authoritarianism or China's AI efforts individually, there's a noticeable lack of research on how these elements intersect within the larger framework of global governance. This paper aims to fill that void by examining how China's domestic model is shaping international digital norms. By utilizing secondary data from academic research, policy documents, and global governance metrics, the study investigates how China is embedding AI across various sectors. It reveals that China's export of surveillance technologies and its advocacy for "cyber-sovereignty" principles pose challenges to liberal democratic ideals and could lead to a fragmentation of global governance systems. The research posits that China's algorithmic statecraft serves as both a tool for domestic control and a strategy for geopolitical influence. The paper wraps up by calling for more comparative research and international regulations to ensure that AI aligns with democratic values.

KEYWORDS: Algorithmic Statecraft, China, Artificial Intelligence Governance, Global Impact

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) has evolved from being just a tech tool to a key player in global governance, significantly changing how countries function. At first, AI was mainly used to enhance service delivery and boost efficiency in areas like public safety and healthcare. But as machine learning, predictive modeling, and big data analytics have progressed, governments are now tapping into AI for political ends. With AI's knack for sifting through massive amounts of data, states can keep an eye on public behavior, predict dissent, and automate regulatory tasks, embedding technology deeper into the fabric of societal intervention (Torfason Hjaltalin & Sigurdarson, [2024](#); Sifat, [2025](#)). This strategic use of AI signals a broader change in how governments perceive and wield their power, both at home and on the international stage.

China is leading the charge in this shift, aggressively integrating AI into its governance both domestically and on the global front. After launching its "New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan" in 2017, China aims to be the world leader in AI by 2030 (Jochheim, [2021](#); Webster, Creemers, Kania & Triolo, [2017](#)). Cities like Hangzhou, Shenzhen, and Beijing have been testing AI-driven governance initiatives in various fields, from traffic management to surveillance (Große-Bley, & Kostka, [2021](#)). A prime example is the Social Credit System, which assigns scores to citizens based on their behavior, affecting their access to services, job opportunities, and mobility (Liu, & Rona-Tas, [2024](#)). The use of facial recognition technology and predictive policing algorithms further illustrates how AI is intricately woven into China's governance framework, enabling a level of surveillance and control that's unprecedented (Bernot & Trevaskes, [2021](#)). This blend of technological capability and political power is not only transforming governance in China but also extending its influence around the world.

The idea of "algorithmic statecraft" really highlights how things are changing. It refers to how governments are using AI, big data, and algorithms to keep political stability, improve governance, and expand their influence (Fourcade & Gordon, [2020](#)). Unlike the old-school governance models that usually react to situations, algorithmic governance aims to be more proactive, using algorithmic insights to handle public security, distribute resources, and shape political narratives (Gritsenko & Wood, [2022](#)). China's approach is a prime example of this, mixing innovation with tight political control, and it presents a fascinating, albeit controversial, alternative to liberal democratic governance (Huang & Malkin, [2025](#)). This shift has major implications for the future of the global political landscape, especially as China plays a bigger role in setting international AI norms and standards. Even though there's growing academic interest, we still don't fully grasp China's AI governance model and its global impact. Much of the research tends to focus either on China's tech advancements or its political framework, often missing how AI is reshaping governance practices and affecting international strategies (Dukach, [2022](#)). Studies on digital authoritarianism usually

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highlight surveillance and censorship but often miss how AI is fundamentally changing state functions and foreign policy (Roberts & Oosterom, [2024](#)). On the flip side, tech-focused studies often overlook the political ramifications of China's AI applications. As a result, there's a significant gap in understanding the intersection of AI, statecraft, and global governance. Very few works dive into how China's algorithmic governance is being spread through technology sales, international partnerships, and involvement in setting global standards (Wang, [2024](#)).

This paper addresses key gaps by exploring two central questions: How has China integrated AI into its governance framework, and what mechanisms underpin its domestic algorithmic statecraft? Secondly, how is China promoting AI governance norms globally, and what risks might this pose to liberal democratic values and global governance structures? These questions form the basis for analyzing China's AI-driven governance model and its global influence. The paper includes eight sections: Introduction, literature review, conceptual framework, methodology, analysis of domestic AI use (e.g., Social Credit System and predictive policing), China's global impact, and concluding policy recommendations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The idea of digital authoritarianism has caught the eye of many scholars as governments around the globe increasingly weave digital technologies into their governance strategies. Supporters claim that these digital tools boost efficiency, enhance public services, and strengthen national security (Mantellassi, [2023](#); Roberts & Oosterom, [2024](#)). According to Fontes, Hohma, Corrigan & Lütge ([2022](#)) Technologies like AI, big data analytics, and surveillance systems are being used to identify threats, prevent crime, and make better use of resources. During emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic, these tools enabled swift government actions, helping to save lives and maintain stability (Vaishya, Javaid, Khan & Haleem, [2020](#); Lv et al. [2024](#)). However, critics warn that these same technologies can be turned against the public to stifle dissent, sway public opinion, and reinforce authoritarian regimes (Reger, [2025](#); Roberts & Oosterom, [2024a](#)). Instead of being neutral, these tools often morph into means of political control, straying far from their original intentions (Kreps & Kriner, [2023](#)). As digital governance continues to grow, worries about human rights, privacy, and democratic accountability intensify, particularly when surveillance is conducted without transparency or oversight (United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, [2022](#); Petryshyn & Hyliaka, [2021](#)). The real threat lies not just in the technologies themselves but in their potential to fundamentally alter the power dynamics between the state and society (Snyder & Snyder, [2025](#)).

China's swift advancement and implementation of AI technologies have sparked significant discussions around digital authoritarianism. Supporters point out that with its massive population, booming tech industry, and unique political landscape, China is in a prime position to rapidly scale AI innovations (Xinhua, [2025](#); Booth, [2025](#)). The country has taken the lead in areas like machine learning, computer vision, and natural language processing (Greeven & Liu, [2025](#); Ma, [2022](#)). AI also enhances governance by boosting efficiency, curbing corruption, and aiding smart city projects (Anthuvan & Maheshwari, [2025](#); Odilla, [2023](#); Kumar, Verma & Mirza, [2024](#)). On the flip side, critics highlight the troubling aspects of China's AI usage. The implementation of facial recognition, predictive policing, and the Social Credit System showcases how technology can facilitate extensive state control (Woods, [2025](#); Wang, Zhang & Xu, [2024](#)). These systems often lack transparency, which reinforces government power and threatens civil liberties (Hill, O'Connor & Slane, [2022](#); Urquhart & Miranda, [2021](#)). Particularly concerning is the AI-driven surveillance in Xinjiang, where these technologies have been linked to serious human rights violations (Kaskina & Cvetkovska, [2024](#); Lee, [2023](#)). While China's technological progress is impressive, it raises significant ethical and political issues on a global scale.

As digital technologies continue to transform how we connect globally, the challenges they bring to global governance are becoming more pressing. Some optimists believe that these digital tools can actually promote more inclusive governance by enabling cross-border activism, enhancing transparency, and allowing for quick responses to crises (Shin et al. [2024](#); Townley & Koop, [2024](#)). For instance, blockchain technology can boost transparency, while AI can support humanitarian efforts by anticipating needs (Zwitter & Boisse-Despiaux, [2018](#); Fernandez-Pontes, [2021](#)). However, the emergence of digital authoritarianism complicates this hopeful outlook. Countries like China, Russia and Iran are pushing for "cyber sovereignty," which directly challenges the liberal vision of an open internet (Sukumar & Basu, [2024](#); Japaridze, [2023](#)). International organizations find it tough to regulate the dual nature of digital technologies, which can empower citizens but also enable repression (Shadikhodjaev, [2021](#)). China's promotion of surveillance technologies through the "Digital Silk Road" is a clear example of how authoritarian models are spreading globally (Carrozza, [2025](#)). As a result, the digital age seems to be driving fragmentation instead of cooperation, which threatens the stability of international institutions (Mayer & Nock, [2025](#)).

Even with a wealth of literature available, there's still a notable gap in our understanding. Many studies tend to look at China's domestic AI governance and its international impact as two separate issues (Lee, [2024](#); Zeng, [2020](#)). Research frequently focuses on technological advancements or internal repression without connecting them to larger geopolitical strategies (Yan, Leidner & Peters, [2024](#)). Additionally, discussions around global governance often miss how the domestic governance models of powerful nations shape international norms (Weiss, [2000](#); Bernauer, Kalbhenn, Koubi & Spilker, [2010](#)). This fragmentation

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makes it hard to see how China's algorithmic statecraft operates, especially since domestic practices are being exported worldwide (He & Ji, [2023](#)). Closing this gap is essential for grasping the international consequences of China's AI-driven governance.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The emergence of algorithmic statecraft can be examined through different lenses, like technological determinism, which posits that technology is the driving force behind societal change. Supporters of this idea argue that AI and big data are set to transform political systems and amplify state power, particularly in areas like surveillance and resource management. As AI continues to advance, it could pave the way for more intricate forms of control. On the flip side, critics of technological determinism contend that this perspective oversimplifies the intricate dynamics between technology and society, emphasizing the importance of considering social, political, and ethical dimensions when assessing AI's influence on governance. Zhang et al. ([2021](#)) highlight the importance of political and social factors in determining how AI is applied, arguing that it's the political context not just the technology itself that will shape how algorithmic governance impacts state power.

Digital sovereignty is key to grasping the concept of algorithmic statecraft. It essentially means a country's ability to control its own digital infrastructure and the data it generates. When it comes to AI governance, this involves overseeing data ownership, privacy, and national security. A prime example is China, which has implemented policies to ensure that AI and data usage in critical areas like healthcare and justice remain under local control. Supporters of this approach argue that it allows nations to maintain their independence from major tech giants like the United States. However, critics warn that digital sovereignty might lead to a fragmented global internet, resulting in isolated digital environments and hindering international collaboration on vital issues like cybersecurity, human rights, and digital trade (Mayer & Nock, [2025](#)).

Global governance theories give us insight into how algorithmic statecraft is changing the landscape of international relations. Traditionally, these theories delve into the ways norms, institutions, and power function on a global scale. However, with the emergence of AI and algorithmic governance, there are growing concerns about potential disruptions to this established framework. As nations implement varying digital policies, the risk of fragmentation in global governance increases. China's idea of "cyber-sovereignty" advocates for state control over digital environments, which poses a challenge to the liberal vision of an open internet and undermines international collaboration. While this model may attract authoritarian regimes eager to tighten their grip on their citizens, Przeworski ([2023](#)) said that it creates hurdles for global governance, which fundamentally depends on international cooperation and the unrestricted exchange of information.

Algorithmic statecraft is often celebrated for enhancing efficiency and fairness in governance by minimizing human bias in decision-making. Take, for instance, how predictive algorithms in courts can help ensure that bail decisions are based on data instead of personal judgment. AI also plays a crucial role in improving public service delivery, aiding in resource allocation, and curbing corruption. On the flip side, critics caution that algorithmic governance might inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities, as AI systems frequently learn from biased historical data. This can lead to ongoing discrimination in critical areas like criminal justice, education, and healthcare, underscoring the importance of tackling underlying social issues alongside technological progress. If these biases are not tackled, AI could end up perpetuating discriminatory practices instead of eliminating them, worsening social inequalities (Kamatala, Naayini & Myakala, [2025](#)).

One major worry with algorithmic statecraft is how it centralizes power. As AI becomes a key player in governance, governments can tighten their grip through surveillance and data monitoring. These centralized systems, often run by the state or its corporate partners, can lead to authoritarianism by stifling dissent. Technologies like facial recognition and social media tracking bring up serious concerns about privacy and civil liberties, especially with the state always watching. While AI-driven governance systems may promise increased efficiency, they also pose a significant threat to democratic values by placing power in the hands of a select few who control the technology (Ghosh, Saini & Barad, [2025](#)).

4. METHODOLOGY

This study critically examines China's AI-driven governance model using a qualitative approach to explore its global implications. It highlights how algorithmic statecraft reflects deeper power dynamics and ideological goals. By analyzing China's internal strategies and efforts to shape international digital sovereignty norms, the research reveals how technology intersects with political authority, influencing global governance and challenging liberal democratic standards. It offers a well-rounded critique of how AI technologies are reshaping both domestic governance and international standards (Tallberg et al. [2023](#)).

The data for this study comes from a variety of secondary sources, including policy reports from Chinese government bodies, international organizations, and academic articles in fields like political science, international relations, and technology studies. Additionally, global governance indices, such as Freedom House's "Freedom on the Net" report, play a role in the analysis. The study employs a dual analytical approach, blending discourse analysis with comparative policy study. Discourse analysis helps to reveal how Chinese officials present AI governance at home while promoting cyber-sovereignty norms abroad, while comparative policy analysis contrasts China's model with digital governance frameworks found in liberal democracies. This combined methodology provides a nuanced understanding of how China's AI governance model both influences and challenges

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existing global governance frameworks, offering valuable insights into the shifting dynamics of digital power (Cheng & Zeng, [2022](#)).

5. CHINA'S AI-DRIVEN MODEL OF GOVERNANCE

Over the last ten years, China has made incredible strides in AI and big data, fundamentally changing its social and economic landscape. The country's unique ability to handle massive amounts of information has given it a leg up in various fields, including healthcare, transportation, and national security. This swift embrace of technology is closely linked to China's success in utilizing big data, especially for surveillance. Innovations like facial recognition, biometric tracking, and predictive policing have bolstered public safety, but they also raise significant concerns about privacy, civil liberties, and the expanding reach of government oversight (Hill, O'Connor & Slane, [2022](#); Laufs & Borrión, [2021](#)).

AI-driven surveillance systems have revolutionized law enforcement in China, allowing for real-time monitoring of public areas. For example, facial recognition technology enables authorities to quickly track and identify individuals, which can deter crime and enhance citizen safety. However, critics point out that these technologies often cross the line from merely maintaining public order to invasive state surveillance. The ongoing tracking and analysis of behavior pose risks to privacy rights, frequently occurring without clear guidelines on how data is collected, utilized, and stored. This lack of transparency fuels concerns about a surveillance state where personal freedoms are significantly restricted (Carter, [2024](#)).

A particularly contentious aspect of AI in China is its pivotal role in the Social Credit System (SCS). This extensive initiative leverages big data analytics to keep tabs on and evaluate the behaviors of both citizens and organizations. The SCS assigns scores based on how well individuals adhere to legal, social, and moral standards. Those who score high enjoy perks like easier access to loans, housing, and transportation, while those with low scores face penalties such as travel bans or job obstacles (Liu & Rona-Tas, [2024](#)). Supporters argue that the system promotes public order and builds social trust by encouraging positive behavior. However, critics caution that the SCS represents a troubling form of algorithmic governance, reducing people to mere data points and subjecting them to unclear evaluations (Liu & Rona-Tas, [2024a](#)). Vulnerable groups often bear the brunt of this system, and its lack of transparency, along with limited avenues for appeal, raises serious concerns about fairness and human rights (Burgess & Wyse, [2022](#)).

Another area where the impact of AI is glaringly evident is in predictive policing. These systems sift through historical crime data to forecast where crimes might happen and who might commit them, supposedly allowing for more efficient law enforcement and resource distribution (Raji & Sholademi, [2024](#)). Advocates claim that predictive policing can help thwart crime, ultimately saving lives and taxpayer money. Yet, critics argue that it perpetuates existing biases found in historical data, leading to the over-policing of marginalized communities and worsening social inequalities (Bircan & Özbilgin, [2025](#)). The algorithms' lack of transparency and the challenges citizens face in questioning their design or outcomes jeopardize public trust in law enforcement and risk deepening societal rifts. As a result, predictive policing serves as a prime example of how AI can both bolster and undermine justice.

When it comes to governance, China has really woven AI into the fabric of its policymaking and administrative processes. These AI systems sift through massive amounts of data to guide decisions on everything from economic strategies to healthcare and environmental policies, allowing for quicker and more informed government actions (Maleki Varnosfaderani & Forouzanfar, [2024](#)). Supporters argue that AI can boost efficiency, improve public services, and enable more flexible governance. However, this growing dependence on AI for decision-making brings up some serious concerns. By centralizing decision-making power, we risk pushing public involvement to the sidelines and reducing transparency (Guan, Dong & Zhao, [2022](#)). Plus, there's the potential for AI to be used in ways that monitor dissent, stifle opposition, and reinforce authoritarian practices. So, while AI holds promise for enhancing governance, it also poses significant threats to democratic values and human rights, making it essential to have thoughtful regulations and ethical oversight in place.

6. GLOBAL DIFFUSION AND IMPACT

The export of surveillance technologies from China to developing nations has raised serious concerns, especially regarding civil liberties and the larger geopolitical landscape. China's advanced surveillance tools, including facial recognition systems, AI-driven monitoring platforms, and data collection technologies, are increasingly being utilized in regions like Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Jili, [2022](#)). Supporters claim that these technologies are vital for enhancing public safety, combating terrorism, and ensuring social order, particularly in countries where law enforcement is lacking. Additionally, gaining access to these cutting-edge technologies is seen as a chance for economic advancement and technological progress, helping nations close the digital gap (Cammarano, Varriale, Michelino & Caputo, [2024](#)). On the flip side, the risk of misuse is significant. Critics point out that without strong regulatory measures, these technologies can lead to political oppression and violations of human rights (Rodrigues, [2020](#)). When authoritarian regimes are equipped with such advanced surveillance tools, it often leads to a decline in privacy rights and freedom of expression, further entrenching undemocratic rule in politically unstable countries.

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China's push for "cyber-sovereignty" on international stages like the United Nations and the World Internet Conference adds a layer of complexity to the global digital landscape. This concept promotes the idea that a nation should have complete control over its own cyberspace, free from outside interference (Hung, 2025). China argues that this principle allows governments to tailor digital policies to fit their national interests while protecting cultural values and security. For many authoritarian regimes, this approach is attractive because it offers a way to tighten their grip on social media, control the flow of information, and silence dissenting voices (Hörster, 2021). Proponents argue that without such control, countries leave themselves open to disruptive cyber threats. However, critics contend that China's push for cyber-sovereignty is more about legitimizing its authoritarian approach to digital governance on a global scale (Hung, 2025a). This model poses a direct challenge to the ideal of a free, open, and interconnected internet, which has historically supported democratic dialogue and global economic cooperation.

China's expanding influence on global digital standards and governance is really shaping the landscape. By actively engaging in international organizations, China is pushing a vision of internet governance that leans heavily towards state control rather than individual rights (Zhao, 2024). Its focus on regulating digital platforms and centralizing information flow is becoming a model that many developing countries are looking to as they try to limit foreign influence and handle internal dissent. However, this shift poses a challenge to long-standing global norms that emphasize personal freedoms, data privacy, and free speech (Martin & Zimmermann, 2024). If more countries adopt Chinese models, we could see a fragmentation of global digital governance, leading to mismatched regulatory environments across different geopolitical regions.

One of the biggest worries is the potential decline of liberal democratic values worldwide. In democratic societies, principles like transparency, individual rights, and privacy are essential. The spread of Chinese surveillance technologies and the acceptance of cyber-sovereignty by developing nations could seriously threaten these values (Jili, 2022a). AI-powered surveillance tools, such as facial recognition and behavioral analysis systems, are often used to stifle political dissent, silence activists, and limit independent journalism. While these technologies are often presented as necessary for public safety, they frequently serve as tools for political control, normalizing practices that go against democratic ideals like freedom of expression, access to information, and the right to privacy.

The global digital landscape is facing a real risk of fragmentation. As more countries start to embrace China's approach to internet governance, we're seeing the rise of distinct digital "spheres of influence" (Sherman, 2022). Nations that align with China tend to support state-led digital control, while others are still pushing for an open and decentralized internet. This growing divide makes it harder for countries to work together on crucial issues like cybersecurity, cross-border data protection, and digital trade. A fragmented digital space weakens the ability of global organizations to maintain digital norms and standards, which only heightens geopolitical tensions and hampers our collective ability to tackle transnational digital threats.

7. DISCUSSION

This section dives into how China is embracing algorithmic statecraft, signaling a significant change in the way governments are leveraging technology to manage and shape society. By weaving together AI, big data, and machine learning in areas like surveillance, social credit systems, and policy enforcement, China aims for enhanced efficiency and tighter control. Yet, this approach brings up serious issues regarding privacy, human rights, and freedom of expression. Its growth poses a challenge to democratic principles and international collaboration, heightening tensions around global digital norms and standards.

7.1 China's strategic use of algorithmic statecraft

China's strategic approach to algorithmic statecraft is paving the way for a new era in how technology is used to manage and govern its people. By harnessing the power of artificial intelligence (AI), big data, and machine learning, China has developed a system that boosts state efficiency, maintains social order, and drives economic growth. The incorporation of AI in governance—through tools like predictive policing, surveillance technologies, and social credit systems—enables the government to monitor and enforce compliance more effectively. Supporters claim that these technological advancements enhance public safety, streamline administrative processes, and promote social stability, all of which are essential for managing a population exceeding 1.4 billion. For example, AI-powered surveillance networks, such as facial recognition systems, are presented as vital security measures, helping the government identify and track potential threats in real-time (Fontes, Hohma, Corrigan & Lütge, 2022). Similarly, the social credit system, which evaluates citizens based on their behavior, is framed as a way to encourage good conduct, build trust within society, and ensure adherence to state norms (Liu & Rona-Tas, 2024b). Economically, the use of AI leads to better decision-making, curbs corruption, and enhances the government's ability to anticipate and address social and political challenges.

Critics have raised serious concerns about China's approach to algorithmic statecraft, particularly regarding its impact on individual freedoms and human rights. One of the biggest worries is the extensive surveillance that comes with it. With AI-driven surveillance and facial recognition technology, the government can keep an eye on citizens like never before, effectively wiping out any sense of privacy (Fontes, Hohma, Corrigan & Lütge, 2022a). Detractors argue that these tactics erode personal autonomy, as people are constantly watched and assessed by algorithms that categorize and judge their actions. The social credit system stands out as a prime example of this, acting as a mechanism for social control that restricts personal freedoms by encouraging

conformity and penalizing dissent. By assigning scores based on behavior, this system can influence access to services, travel, and job opportunities, creating a pressure cooker environment where citizens feel compelled to align with state-sanctioned norms. Such practices pose a direct challenge to core democratic values like freedom of expression, privacy, and the right to protest, as they stifle critical discussions and alternative perspectives (Chehoudi, 2025). Additionally, the opacity surrounding how these systems operate leaves citizens in the dark about how their actions are assessed or how they can dispute their scores.

One major concern with China's approach is the lack of transparency and the concentration of power that comes with algorithmic governance. When AI is used for surveillance and social control, it often operates without the necessary checks and balances, making it tough for citizens to hold the government accountable. In contrast to democratic nations that have systems in place for oversight, China's centralized governance limits transparency and public involvement in decision-making. Here, AI technologies are implemented from the top down, allowing state authorities to access extensive personal data while citizens have minimal control over how their information is utilized or shared (Bardhan, 2020). This centralized method of data processing and decision-making makes it hard for individuals to contest government decisions or correct mistakes in their social credit scores or surveillance records. Such centralization risks giving the government unchecked power, heightening the chances of human rights violations and undermining the democratic ideals of accountability and oversight (Jong & Faerman, 2021).

China's approach to algorithmic governance presents some serious challenges to international standards, especially regarding digital governance and human rights. As China continues to share its surveillance technologies with other nations, it risks spreading its authoritarian style of AI management. Countries that embrace these technologies might find themselves under pressure to adopt similar governance models, which could clash with democratic principles like privacy, freedom of expression, and personal autonomy (Jili, 2022b). By championing cyber-sovereignty, China aims to bolster its grip on the global digital landscape, pushing for national control over the internet and the regulation of data within their borders. This has wider implications for global cooperation, creating a rift between nations that value individual rights and freedoms and those that lean towards a more centralized, authoritarian governance style (Muhammad, 2023). If this trend continues unchecked, we could see a fragmentation of global digital norms, making international collaboration in the digital space increasingly challenging. While AI and big data offer tremendous opportunities for growth and governance, China's strategic application of these technologies underscores the tension between innovation and human rights, raising important ethical questions about the impact of algorithmic governance both at home and around the world.

7.2 Implications for human rights, democracy, and international cooperation

The emergence of algorithmic statecraft, particularly with China leading the way, carries significant consequences for human rights, democracy, and global collaboration. While technologies like AI, big data, and machine learning promise efficiency and growth, they also pose serious threats to privacy and personal freedoms. China's implementation of AI for surveillance, predictive policing, and social credit systems showcases both the advantages and dangers involved.

On one side of the debate, supporters claim that China's approach to algorithmic governance marked by the integration of AI, big data analytics, and sophisticated surveillance systems—boosts public safety, order, and social stability. For instance, AI-driven facial recognition and surveillance technologies are touted as essential tools for preventing crime, ensuring national security, and keeping an eye on social behavior. China's widespread use of these technologies has effectively helped identify and apprehend criminal suspects in real-time, which is crucial for upholding law and order (Wu & Lin, 2025). Additionally, while the social credit system raises eyebrows, it is defended as a means to encourage ethical behavior, build trust within society, and enhance public cooperation with government initiatives (Kostka, 2019). By tying citizens' actions to their access to services like travel, healthcare, and housing, the social credit system is said to promote responsible citizenship and discourage negative behavior. In this light, the government's role in guiding and regulating social conduct through AI and data-driven systems is portrayed as vital for maintaining societal harmony and preventing chaos, particularly in a densely populated and diverse country like China.

Additionally, supporters of algorithmic governance highlight the perks of efficiency and quick responses that come with the growing use of AI and big data. By automating decision-making and offering almost instant analysis of huge data sets, these technologies allow governments to tackle emerging issues more swiftly. Predictive policing, for instance; powered by AI algorithms, it can spot areas where crime might spike, helping law enforcement allocate their resources more effectively (Raji & Sholademi, 2024a). Likewise, AI tools in healthcare, logistics, and public administration can simplify operations, cut down on red tape, and enhance service delivery, all of which play a part in the country's overall growth and modernization. In the context of China's rapid economic expansion and its ambition for global tech leadership, these innovations are viewed as crucial for solidifying its role as a significant player on the world stage.

Critics are raising some serious red flags about the use of algorithmic statecraft in China, especially when it comes to human rights, democracy, and individual freedoms. One of the biggest worries is the alarming decline of privacy. With AI-powered surveillance systems, like facial recognition cameras popping up in public areas, the level of state monitoring over citizens has reached an all-time high. This constant surveillance, which keeps tabs on people in real-time, is viewed as a violation

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of the right to privacy, eroding personal autonomy and freedom (Fontes, Hohma, Corrigan & Lutge, [2022b](#)). It is pointed out that in a society where the government controls nearly every facet of life, the idea of being free from surveillance feels more like a fantasy. The social credit system only adds to these worries by tying personal behavior to a public score that can affect access to education, jobs, and financial services, essentially punishing people for actions the state considers undesirable (Yu, Li, Tang & Zhang, [2015](#)). Critics contend that such a system fosters an atmosphere of social control that suppresses individual expression, weakens freedom of speech, and restricts the ability to voice dissent.

One of the biggest criticisms of China's algorithmic governance is how it threatens democratic values. In contrast to democratic systems that emphasize transparency, checks and balances, and public participation, China's centralized, AI-driven model restricts citizen engagement and accountability. The power to make decisions is heavily concentrated in the hands of the government, which leaves little room for oversight. Detractors argue that this environment encourages authoritarianism, allowing the state to manipulate data, enforce conformity, and limit civil liberties. Additionally, the use of AI for social control and surveillance seriously undermines core democratic principles, such as freedom of expression and the right to protest. As technology is employed to monitor and punish individuals for their actions, it risks suppressing political dissent and hindering civil society's ability to engage in open and critical discussions (Perez-Des Rosiers, [2021](#)). This transition from a participatory democratic system to a more authoritarian one raises serious concerns about the erosion of individual rights under the guise of state security and social order.

When we look beyond the immediate threats to human rights and democratic values, China's approach to algorithmic governance raises significant concerns for international collaboration and the overall digital environment. Their strategy, which focuses on cyber-sovereignty and strict control over digital systems, clashes with the more open and interconnected vision of the internet that many democratic nations support (Hung, [2025a](#)). By pushing for national oversight of data and online spaces, China aims to establish its dominance in global internet governance, challenging the concept of a unified, free, and open internet. This has sparked increasing friction between China and Western countries, especially those that value privacy, freedom of speech, and internet liberties. As China continues to advocate for its model of algorithmic governance in international venues like the United Nations and the World Internet Conference, it is influencing global digital standards and norms. However, critics warn that this drive for cyber-sovereignty could lead to a fragmented digital world, where countries with varying governance styles take different paths in AI regulation and internet freedom (Hung, [2025b](#)). Such fragmentation might complicate global efforts to tackle crucial issues like cybersecurity, data protection, and the ethical use of AI.

A closer look at the implications of China exporting surveillance technologies to developing nations. This trend raises some serious concerns about the potential spread of authoritarian governance models. As China shares its cutting-edge surveillance and AI tools with countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, it risks fostering similar systems of social control and digital authoritarianism (Woods, [2025](#)). While these technologies are often pitched as enhancements for security and governance, they can just as easily be wielded to stifle political dissent, limit civil liberties, and keep a close watch on citizens. The export of China's algorithmic governance model to other countries only deepens the rift between democratic and authoritarian approaches to digital governance. Sure, some nations might reap the benefits of the technological advancements that come with China's backing, but others could find their political freedoms eroded and human rights compromised. This widening global divide could pose significant challenges for international cooperation on critical issues like human rights protection, digital privacy, and the ethical development of AI, as countries with differing values and governance styles clash over these vital matters.

7.3 Risks of a global divide between AI governance models (authoritarian vs. democratic)

The ongoing debate about authoritarian versus democratic AI governance models reveals some interesting perks of the authoritarian approach. Advocates believe that a centralized, algorithm-driven system can really boost efficiency and stability in governance, especially when it comes to managing large populations and keeping an eye on societal behavior. In authoritarian regimes, AI-powered surveillance tools like facial recognition and social credit systems have been credited with enhancing national security by spotting threats and curbing anti-government activities (Cevallos, [2025](#)). AI-driven governance has the potential to predict crime, keep order, and boost efficiency, which can be a game-changer for countries that thrive on centralized control for stability and growth. Proponents believe it allows for swift and adaptable decision-making, helping emerging economies tackle the intricate challenges of governance.

Authoritarian regimes often claim that AI can help create social harmony and cut down on corruption by keeping an eye on behaviors that clash with state objectives. By monitoring what citizens do, AI promotes compliance, maintains order, and improves decision-making. Supporters see AI as a means to drive economic growth and stability, putting societal advancement ahead of individual liberties. Critics point out that the global gap in AI governance models poses serious threats to human rights, personal freedoms, and democracy itself. The authoritarian model, which leans heavily on surveillance and control, raises some deep ethical questions. One of the biggest concerns is the invasion of privacy. In places where AI is used to monitor citizens' movements, activities, and even thoughts, people might find their right to a private life stripped away. This kind of constant surveillance can create a chilling atmosphere, making individuals hesitant to voice dissent or engage in political activism (Murray

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et al. [2024](#)). Moreover, the use of predictive policing algorithms in authoritarian regimes can reinforce existing social biases, leading to the over-policing of certain communities and worsening inequality. As AI systems become more integrated into government operations, the risk of misuse grows, giving governments unprecedented power to keep tabs on and control their populations, ultimately suppressing free speech and stifling opposition.

In contrast, the democratic model of AI governance, which emphasizes transparency, accountability, and the protection of human rights, serves as a counterbalance to the authoritarian approach. Democratic systems are founded on principles of checks and balances, ensuring that the use of AI is closely monitored and regulated. Governments in democratic societies are dedicated to safeguarding citizens' privacy and civil liberties, making sure that AI technologies don't encroach on fundamental freedoms. In these environments, AI governance is designed to benefit the public, promoting an open and participatory process where citizens have a say in decision-making. By integrating ethical guidelines and frameworks into the development and use of AI technologies, democracies strive to reduce the risks of surveillance and control, ensuring that AI is applied in ways that honor individual rights and freedoms (Radanliev, [2025](#)). The differences in how democracies and authoritarian regimes handle AI governance are posing real challenges for international cooperation. Authoritarian governments tend to focus on state control, which raises alarms about digital authoritarianism and the potential decline of democratic values. This fragmentation might spark an AI arms race, putting privacy, human rights, and cybersecurity at risk. Without unified standards, we could see political inequalities worsen, making global collaboration even tougher. The clash between centralized control in some AI ecosystems and the push for transparency and freedoms could strain diplomatic relations and complicate our efforts to tackle pressing global issues like climate change and cyber threats.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The emergence of algorithmic governance, especially in how China strategically employs artificial intelligence (AI), has significant implications for both its internal control and its influence on the global stage. China's use of AI in areas like surveillance, facial recognition, and its social credit system showcases how these technologies can bolster state power and improve public administration. While these advancements might bring about increased efficiency and security, they also spark serious ethical questions regarding privacy, civil liberties, and freedom of expression. Even more concerning is China's advocacy for "cyber-sovereignty" and its efforts to export AI governance models to developing countries, which could reshape the global digital landscape in a way that aligns with authoritarian ideals. This trend exacerbates the divide between liberal and illiberal approaches to AI, threatening global standards of transparency and human rights. China's ambitions go beyond mere surveillance; it aims to sway global norms by sharing its AI technologies and engaging in international discussions on digital governance. As more nations adopt these systems, there's a rising risk that authoritarian practices could become the norm, endangering democratic values like free speech and due process. In light of this, democratic countries need to enhance their collaboration to create ethical AI frameworks that prioritize transparency, accountability, and human dignity, ensuring that technology promotes freedom rather than oppression.

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