AI and Social Aspects

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The most revealing aspect of contemporary AI discourse isn't what gets said—it's who gets to say it. In the sprawling landscape of artificial intelligence debate, where 845 articles invoke "governance" and 559 call for "regulation," we encounter a fundamental paradox: those who speak loudest about controlling AI are rarely those most controlled by it. This gap between discourse and experience reveals the architecture of power that shapes how we understand, implement, and resist algorithmic systems.

The evidence paints a stark picture. While regulatory bodies draft frameworks and tech companies promise ethical AI, students face false arrests from surveillance algorithms, as documented in [23]. Workers lose wages to opaque platform calculations that [31] reveals as systematic exploitation. Welfare recipients find themselves flagged as fraudsters by algorithms they never consented to, a pattern [30] exposes across multiple jurisdictions.

[23] School AI surveillance like Gaggle can lead to false alarms, arrests ...

[31] Why Gig Platform Wage Theft is a Governance Crisis

[30] What happened when AI went after welfare fraud - WBUR

These aren't isolated incidents but symptoms of a deeper power imbalance. The discourse of AI—dominated by discussions of efficiency, innovation, and risk management—systematically excludes the voices of those who bear its greatest costs. By examining who shapes the conversation, who remains silent, and who profits from these silences, we can begin to understand how power operates in the age of algorithms.

The Governance Performance: Authority Without Accountability

The sheer volume of governance discourse—37% of all articles invoke this frame—suggests robust oversight. Yet this apparent concern with control masks a more troubling reality: governance has become a performance that legitimizes AI deployment rather than constraining it. When [15] praises a decade of AI use in public services, it celebrates efficiency gains while noting the complete absence of impact assessments. This pattern—implementation first, evaluation never—reveals governance as retrospective rationalization rather than prospective protection.

[15] La Cour des comptes salue l'usage fait de l'IA depuis 10 ...

The European Union's regulatory frameworks, often held up as the gold standard, demonstrate this performative quality. While producing volumes of guidelines and directives, these frameworks consistently fail to prevent the harms they ostensibly address. [13] documents how even clear violations of biometric data protections in educational settings result in minimal consequences. The sanctions come after the harm, the frameworks after the implementation, the accountability after the automation.

[13] La AEPD sanciona el tratamiento de datos biométricos con IA en la ...

This governance theater serves a crucial function: it creates the appearance of control while facilitating expansion. Institutions can claim compliance with ethical frameworks while deploying increasingly invasive systems. [7] reveals how public employment services frame algorithmic control as "accompaniment," transforming surveillance into support through linguistic alchemy. The workers subject to these systems experience them differently, as [33] documents—not as assistance but as arbitrary judgment by opaque systems.

[7] France Travail : l'impact de l'IA sur l'accompagnement des ...

[33] À France Travail, le contrôle algorithmique baffoue les droits des ...

The power to define what counts as "governance" thus becomes central to maintaining existing hierarchies. When regulatory bodies focus on technical compliance rather than lived experience, when impact assessments examine efficiency rather than dignity, when frameworks protect institutional interests rather than individual rights, governance becomes a tool of power rather than a check on it.

The Geography of Harm: Center and Periphery in AI Development

Power in AI discourse follows colonial patterns, with innovation concentrated in the Global North and experimentation inflicted on the Global South. [28] exposes how Western-designed educational AI systems impose foreign pedagogical approaches, treating African classrooms as testing grounds for technologies that embed cultural biases. The promise of "leapfrogging" development through AI masks a deeper dynamic: those least able to refuse become involuntary subjects of algorithmic experiments.

[28] The cultural cost of AI in Africa's education systems - UNESCO

This geographic inequality extends beyond implementation to the very data that trains these systems. [22] reveals the hidden labor that makes "ethical" AI possible—workers in Nairobi exposed to extreme content for poverty wages, their psychological trauma the unacknowledged cost of making chatbots safe for Western users. The same pattern repeats across the industry, as [5] documents: armies of workers in "digital sweatshops" labeling data, their invisible labor powering systems that will ultimately displace them.

[22] OpenAI Used Kenyan Workers Making $2 an Hour to Filter Traumatic ... - VICE

[5] Detrás del auge de la Inteligencia Artificial hay un ejército de ...

The discourse of "global AI adoption" obscures these power dynamics. When [1] celebrates expansion, it frames inequality as a temporary lag rather than a structural feature. But as [18] demonstrates, the gap isn't just about access—it's about who gets to define problems, design solutions, and profit from implementation. Regions become either innovation centers or extraction sites, never equal partners in development.

[1] Global AI adoption in 2025 - A widening digital divide

[18] Latin America is falling behind in research on AI and disinformation, study finds

Even well-intentioned efforts to address this imbalance often reinforce it. [9] documents numerous AI education initiatives, but reveals that most rely on imported technologies adapted to local contexts rather than locally-developed solutions. The power to innovate remains concentrated even as the rhetoric of inclusion proliferates. This dynamic creates what [6] calls "technological dependency disguised as development."

[9] How AI Is Transforming Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: Lessons from 193 solutions

[6] El Sur Global necesita apropiarse de su revolución de la IA

The Surveillance Dividend: Profiting from Student Monitoring

Perhaps nowhere is the power imbalance more stark than in educational AI surveillance. [26] documents how monitoring systems marketed as protecting students instead subject them to constant surveillance, generating profits for tech companies while traumatizing those they claim to protect. The power dynamic is clear: adults make purchasing decisions, companies make profits, and students bear the consequences.

[26] Students have been called to the office for AI surveillance false alarms

The scale of this surveillance economy is staggering. [29] reveals how the same technologies monitor everything from mental health to political activity, creating comprehensive profiles that follow students long after graduation. These systems operate on a logic of preemption—identifying "at-risk" students before problems manifest—but as [23] shows, the false positive rate is extraordinary. Students are arrested for obvious jokes, investigated for creative writing, and flagged for normal adolescent expression.

[29] Under Surveillance: Campus Protest, Generative AI, and the Erosion of ...

[23] School AI surveillance like Gaggle can lead to false alarms, arrests ...

The companies behind these systems wield enormous power through opacity. They claim proprietary algorithms prevent transparency, that effectiveness requires secrecy, that student safety justifies any intrusion. When [19] challenged these systems on constitutional grounds, the companies responded not with evidence of effectiveness but with testimonials about "lives saved"—anecdotes that obscure systematic harm.

[19] Lawrence school district sued in federal court for use of AI-powered ...

The power to surveil becomes self-justifying. Schools, fearing liability for any incident they might have prevented, expand monitoring. Companies, profiting from fear, market increasingly invasive capabil-

ities. Students, with no voice in these decisions, adapt their behavior to algorithmic expectations. As [4] argues, this represents "displacement AI" at its worst—technology that replaces human judgment with algorithmic classification, destroying trust while claiming to protect it.

[4] CJUU — ClimateUni Statement on AI - Climate Justice Universities Union

The Expertise Monopoly: Who Defines Bias and How to Fix It

The power to define problems shapes the power to prescribe solutions. In AI discourse, "bias" has become the dominant frame for understanding algorithmic harm—a technical problem requiring technical solutions. [21] reveals the complexity of this challenge, demonstrating how attempts to reduce one form of bias often amplify others. Yet this technical framing obscures a more fundamental question: who decides what counts as bias and what counts as fairness?

[21] No Free Lunch in Language Model Bias Mitigation ...

The monopoly on expertise excludes those most affected by algorithmic decisions. When [2] reviews bias across educational AI systems, it draws on computer science, not critical race theory. When companies conduct bias audits, they employ statisticians, not sociologists. This narrowing of expertise to technical domains ensures that solutions remain within comfortable bounds—tweaking algorithms rather than questioning their deployment.

[2] Algorithmic Bias in Education | International Journal of Artificial ...

Legal frameworks reinforce this expertise monopoly. [1] outlines compliance strategies that focus on statistical parity rather than substantive justice. The measure of fairness becomes whether an algorithm discriminates at the same rate as human decision-makers, not whether discrimination should exist at all. [20] documents how even civil rights organizations struggle to translate lived experience of discrimination into the statistical language that courts recognize.

[1] AI-Assisted Hiring in 2026: Managing Discrimination Risk

[20] Lutter contre les discriminations produites par les algorithmes et l'I ...

This technical framing serves power by limiting the scope of possible interventions. If bias is a bug to be fixed rather than a feature of systems designed to classify and sort, then the solution is better algorithms, not fewer algorithms. If discrimination is a statistical deviation rather than a structural pattern, then the remedy is technical adjustment, not political transformation. The expertise monopoly thus protects existing power relations by ensuring that challenges to AI systems must speak the language of those who build them.

The False Promise of Inclusion: Participation Without Power

As criticism of AI's concentrated power has grown, so have efforts at "inclusion" and "participation." Stakeholder consultations proliferate, ethics boards multiply, and frameworks emphasize "human-centered"

design. Yet [3] reveals the limitation of these efforts: they focus on including marginalized voices in implementation rather than questioning whether implementation should occur at all.

[3] Bridging educational equity gaps: expanding the CHAT-ACTS ... - Springer

The participation paradox is that inclusion often legitimizes exclusion. When companies convene advisory boards with community representatives, they gain social license while retaining decision-making power. When frameworks mandate "stakeholder engagement," they define both who counts as a stakeholder and what counts as engagement. [16] documents how educational AI initiatives invoke "equity" while reinforcing existing inequalities, using the language of inclusion to obscure the reality of imposition.

[16] La inteligencia artificial en la educación: potencial transformador ...

This dynamic is particularly acute in educational settings. Students—the primary subjects of educational AI—are rarely consulted about its deployment. When [27] challenged surveillance systems through the courts, it represented a seizure of voice by those systematically excluded from decisions affecting them. The lawsuit revealed what participation without power produces: systems designed for students but against their interests, justified by their protection but experienced as persecution.

[27] Students Sue Kansas School District, Alleging Digital Surveillance

The promise of "democratizing" AI through wider participation misunderstands how power operates. Adding voices to existing processes doesn't redistribute power if those processes remain structured to produce predetermined outcomes. When [10] calls for teacher involvement in AI development, it assumes that inclusion in technical processes can counteract structural powerlessness. But as long as the fundamental question—should this system exist?—remains outside the scope of participation, inclusion serves to manage dissent rather than empower alternatives.

[10] IA et éducation : menace ou opportunités… quelques réflexions

Labor's Disappearing Act: Automation and the Erasure of Work

One of power's most effective strategies is making itself invisible. In AI discourse, this manifests most clearly in how human labor disappears from narratives of automation. The "artificial" in artificial intelligence obscures the very real human work that makes these systems function. [32] reveals how hiring algorithms didn't eliminate bias—they automated it, making discrimination harder to see and challenge.

[32] Workday Class Action Lawsuit, Millions Of Job Seekers Over 40 Just Got ...

The erasure of labor operates at multiple levels. First, the labor that creates AI systems disappears. When we interact with a chatbot, we don't see the thousands of workers who labeled training data, as [11] documents. Their work—often traumatic, always underpaid—

[11] Kenya's President Wades Into Meta Lawsuits - TIME

becomes invisible infrastructure. Second, the labor that AI displaces disappears from economic planning. [12] celebrates efficiency gains without acknowledging the workers made redundant by automation.

[12] L'Intelligence Artificielle en Afrique : entre promesses de ...

Most insidiously, the labor of those subjected to AI systems disappears. Students must learn to navigate surveillance algorithms, workers must adapt to algorithmic management, welfare recipients must prove their worthiness to automated systems. This labor—what [33] calls "algorithmic emotional labor"—goes uncompensated and unrecognized. People must make themselves legible to machines, transforming their communication, behavior, and self-presentation to avoid algorithmic punishment.

[33] À France Travail, le contrôle algorithmique baffoue les droits des ...

The discourse of AI as autonomous technology serves capital by obscuring these labor relations. If AI systems function independently, then their discriminatory outcomes are technical glitches rather than exploitative design. If algorithms make decisions, then no human bears responsibility for their consequences. This erasure of labor from AI narratives protects power by making it seem like no one is exercising it—discrimination just happens, surveillance just exists, workers just disappear.

Resistance and Refusal: Power from Below

Despite the overwhelming asymmetry of power in AI systems, resistance emerges from those most subjected to algorithmic control. This resistance rarely takes the form of organized opposition to AI as such—instead, it manifests as countless acts of refusal, subversion, and creative non-compliance. [29] documents how students develop elaborate strategies to evade algorithmic surveillance, from coded language to platform-hopping to digital silence.

[29] Under Surveillance: Campus Protest, Generative AI, and the Erosion of ...

Legal challenges represent one form of organized resistance. The lawsuits documented in [25] don't just seek individual remedy—they attempt to establish precedents that limit algorithmic power. By forcing transparency through open records requests and challenging surveillance on constitutional grounds, these cases create friction in systems designed for frictionless expansion.

[25] Students allege continued unconstitutional AI digital monitoring and ...

Workers subjected to algorithmic management develop their own forms of resistance. [31] reveals how drivers share information about algorithmic patterns, collectively learning to game systems designed to extract maximum labor for minimum pay. These networks of informal knowledge-sharing represent a kind of counter-expertise, developed not in laboratories but through lived experience of algorithmic control.

[31] Why Gig Platform Wage Theft is a Governance Crisis

Institutional resistance emerges where professional identity conflicts with algorithmic imperatives. [4] represents faculty organizing against "displacement AI" that threatens pedagogical relationships. [14] documents how education unions across multiple countries coordinate resistance to algorithmic assessment. These movements recognize that professional autonomy and algorithmic control are fundamentally incompatible.

[4] CJUU — ClimateUni Statement on AI - Climate Justice Universities Union

[14] La confianza no se automatiza: los sindicatos de la educación redefinen ...

Yet resistance faces structural limitations. Individual acts of refusal can mitigate personal harm but rarely challenge systemic power. Legal challenges proceed slowly while AI deployment accelerates. Professional resistance confronts the economic logic that drives institutional adoption. Most fundamentally, resistance often must use the master's tools—engaging with systems to challenge them, generating data through the act of refusal, becoming legible to power in the process of opposing it.

Reimagining Power: Toward Alternative Futures

The current distribution of power in AI discourse—concentrated in tech companies, diffused through institutional adoption, experienced as inevitable by those it controls—is not natural or necessary. Understanding how this configuration emerged and persists opens possibilities for reimagining alternatives. What would AI development look like if those most affected held decision-making power? How might educational technology differ if students designed it? What would algorithmic systems become if workers controlled them?

[24] offers one vision: algorithmic sovereignty, where communities control the systems that govern them. This isn't merely about transparency or accountability but about fundamental redistribution of power. Communities would decide not just how algorithms work but whether they should exist at all. The technical capacity to build AI systems would be matched by the political capacity to refuse them.

[24] Sesgos y discriminación en la inteligencia artificial del sector público

Alternative models emerge at the margins. [8] documents community-driven AI development that begins with local needs rather than imported solutions. [17] proposes legal frameworks that privilege human dignity over efficiency. These experiments remain limited, constrained by existing power structures, but they demonstrate that alternatives are possible.

[8] How AI can transform Africa's learning crisis into a ... - UNICEF

[17] La inteligencia artificial en la educación: retos legales y éticos para ...

The path toward different futures requires recognizing that power in AI discourse isn't just about who controls technology but about who controls the conversation about technology. When we accept that bias is a technical problem, that governance is about compliance, that

inclusion means participation without power, we've already ceded the terrain of possibility. Transforming AI's impact requires first transforming how we understand and discuss it.

The discourse of AI will continue to evolve, but its power dynamics will remain unless actively challenged. Those who benefit from current arrangements—tech companies from opacity, institutions from efficiency, consultants from complexity—have every incentive to maintain them. Change will come not from those who profit from AI discourse but from those who pay its costs. Their voices, systematically excluded from conferences and frameworks, carry the knowledge needed to build better futures. The question is whether we're willing to listen.

The evidence reveals AI discourse as a space where power operates through systematic exclusions, technical mystification, and the manufacture of inevitability. Those who shape the conversation rarely experience its consequences. Those who bear its costs rarely shape its direction. This gap—between discourse and experience, between power and impact—defines our current moment. Closing it requires more than inclusive frameworks or ethical guidelines. It demands a fundamental redistribution of power over AI: who designs it, who deploys it, and who decides. Until those most affected by algorithmic systems control their development and deployment, AI discourse will remain what it is today—a conversation among the powerful about how to manage the powerless.

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