

National Dialogue Processes in the Digital Age: Artificial Intelligence, Epistemic Governance, and Political Inclusion

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Abstract

The concept of national dialogue has been one of the most important tools in transitional governance and post-conflict peacebuilding. As more civic participation infrastructures are coming under the sway of Artificial Intelligence (AI), such as natural language processing (NLP), machine learning classifiers, and generative AI systems, dialogue secretariats and international partners are implementing AI-aided ones to accommodate large-scale consultations, cluster grievances, translate submissions, and summarise proceedings. However, the literature on AI has mainly viewed AI as a technology that is neutral in its effects or a way to broadly rethink democracy, and not how AI is actually reorganizing the epistemic and institutional landscape of the national discourse itself. In this paper, it is stated that AI is an institutional actor in the process of national dialogue by redefining the construction of representation, the prioritisation of the agenda, and the way legitimacy is enacted. The study based on comparative qualitative research in Sudan (2019-2022), Ethiopia (2021-2023), and Kenya (2022-2024) which included 28 semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and aggregated data of consultation highlights three structural changes brought about by AI-assisted dialog systems, namely (1) datafied representation, (2) algorithmic agenda-setting, and (3) platform-mediated formation of legitimacy. The structural implications of the asymmetry in digital participation and the patterns of algorithmic clustering are stated through statistical robustness tests such as confidence interval modelling, proportion testing and regression analysis. The combination of the peacebuilding theory and the algorithmic governance with the Science and Technology Studies (STS) and the postcolonial digital critique contributes to the development of the framework of AI-mediated epistemic governance. It concludes with a solution of institutional protection based on weak political transitions.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; National dialogue; Epistemic governance; Algorithmic governance; Peacebuilding.

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Processos de Diálogo Nacional na Era Digital: Inteligência Artificial, Governança Epistêmica e Inclusão Política

Resumo

O conceito de diálogo nacional tem sido uma das ferramentas mais importantes para a governança de transição e a construção da paz em contextos pós-conflito. À medida que mais infraestruturas de participação cívica passam a ser influenciadas pela Inteligência Artificial (IA), incluindo processamento de linguagem natural (PLN), classificadores de aprendizado de máquina e sistemas de IA generativa, secretariados de diálogo e parceiros internacionais vêm implementando mecanismos assistidos por IA para gerir consultas em larga escala, agrupar reivindicações, traduzir contribuições e sintetizar deliberações. No entanto, a literatura sobre IA tem tratado predominantemente essa tecnologia como neutra em seus efeitos ou como uma ferramenta para repensar a democracia de forma ampla, sem examinar como ela está efetivamente reorganizando os fundamentos epistêmicos e institucionais do próprio discurso nacional. Este artigo argumenta que a IA atua como um agente institucional nos processos de diálogo nacional ao redefinir a construção da representação, a priorização das agendas e as formas pelas quais a legitimidade é produzida. Com base em uma pesquisa qualitativa comparativa realizada no Sudão (2019–2022), Etiópia (2021–2023) e Quênia (2022–2024), envolvendo 28 entrevistas semiestruturadas, análise documental e dados agregados de consultas, o estudo identifica três transformações estruturais promovidas por sistemas de diálogo assistidos por IA: (1) representação baseada em dados, (2) definição algorítmica de agendas e (3) formação de legitimidade mediada por plataformas. As implicações estruturais das assimetrias de participação digital e dos padrões de agrupamento algorítmico são examinadas por meio de testes de robustez estatística, incluindo modelagem por intervalos de confiança, testes de proporção e análise de regressão. A combinação da teoria da construção da paz e da governança algorítmica com os Estudos de Ciência e Tecnologia (STS) e a crítica digital pós-colonial contribui para o desenvolvimento de um quadro analítico de governança epistêmica mediada por IA. O estudo conclui propondo salvaguardas institucionais adequadas a contextos de transições políticas frágeis.

Palavras-chave: Memória cultural, insurgencia maoísta, literatura nepalesa, teoria poscolonial, agencia subalterna, teoría del trauma.

Procesos de Diálogo Nacional en la Era Digital: Inteligencia Artificial, Gobernanza Epistémica e Inclusión Política

Resumen

El concepto de diálogo nacional se ha consolidado como una de las herramientas más importantes en la gobernanza transicional y la consolidación de la paz en contextos de posconflicto. A medida que las infraestructuras de participación ciudadana incorporan cada vez más sistemas de Inteligencia Artificial (IA), incluyendo procesamiento del lenguaje natural (PLN), clasificadores de aprendizaje automático y herramientas de IA generativa, las secretarías de diálogo y los socios internacionales han comenzado a utilizar mecanismos asistidos por IA para gestionar consultas a gran escala, agrupar demandas ciudadanas, traducir contribuciones y sintetizar deliberaciones. Sin embargo, la literatura existente ha tendido a considerar la IA como una tecnología neutral o como un instrumento general para repensar la democracia, prestando escasa atención a la manera en que reconfigura los fundamentos epistemológicos e institucionales de los propios procesos de diálogo nacional. Este artículo sostiene que la IA actúa como un actor institucional dentro de los procesos de diálogo nacional al redefinir la construcción de la representación, la priorización de las agendas y los mecanismos mediante los cuales se produce la legitimidad. Basado en una investigación cualitativa comparativa realizada en Sudán (2019–2022), Etiopía (2021–2023) y Kenia (2022–2024), que incluyó 28 entrevistas semiestructuradas, análisis documental y datos agregados de consultas públicas, el estudio identifica tres transformaciones estructurales asociadas con los sistemas de diálogo asistidos por IA: (1) la representación basada en datos, (2) la definición algorítmica de agendas y (3) la formación de legitimidad mediada por plataformas digitales. Asimismo, se examinan las implicaciones estructurales derivadas de las asimetrías en la participación digital y los patrones de agrupamiento algorítmico mediante pruebas de robustez estadística, incluyendo intervalos de confianza, pruebas de proporciones y análisis de regresión. Al integrar la teoría de la construcción de la paz y la gobernanza algorítmica con los Estudios de Ciencia y Tecnología (STS) y la crítica digital poscolonial, el artículo desarrolla un marco analítico de gobernanza epistémica mediada por IA. Finalmente, propone salvaguardas institucionales orientadas a fortalecer la inclusión política y la legitimidad democrática en contextos de transición política frágil.

Palabras clave: Inteligencia artificial; Diálogo nacional; Gobernanza epistémica; Gobernanza algorítmica; Construcción de la paz.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, national dialogues have emerged as a preferred mechanism for managing deep political crises in fragile and transitional states. Convened in the wake of authoritarian collapse, electoral violence, mass protests, or protracted civil conflicts, these structured, time-limited processes provide inclusive forums for political actors and societal constituencies to renegotiate political power, constitutional frameworks, and national identity (Haider, 2019; Mandikwaza, 2024). Typically assembled during severe legitimacy crises—when incumbent institutions lack the authority or public trust to arbitrate disputes—national dialogues aim to forge a new political settlement through structured deliberation. Ultimately, their normative appeal rests on a two-fold promise: first, that broad-based inclusion fosters democratic legitimacy, and second, that negotiated compromise can stabilize contested transitions.

At their core, national dialogues are designed to mediate between elite bargaining and broader societal engagement. They frequently integrate high-level negotiations among political leaders with public consultations, working groups, and civil society participation. This “middle-way” design acknowledges that sustainable peace requires both elite accommodation and societal approval. Consequently, the structural architecture of a national dialogue—including who participates, how submissions are aggregated, how agendas are framed, and how outcomes are reported—is central to its credibility. The process itself generates legitimacy by demonstrating transparency, inclusivity, and responsiveness before any substantive outcomes are finalized. In this regard, national dialogues are not merely procedural devices; they operate as institutional technologies for generating political power.

Meanwhile, Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems are increasingly being integrated into governance infrastructures across various sectors. As machine learning tools permeate public administration (Yeung, 2018), algorithmic systems are being deployed by governments and international organizations to manage massive datasets, automate classification tasks, and assist policymakers. This shift accelerated with the widespread release and adoption of large language models (LLMs) in 2022, which introduced capabilities for automated summarization, translation, textual submission clustering, and interactive civic interfaces (Bommasani et al., 2021; Choi et al., 2025). Today, these systems are routinely utilized to process citizen feedback, monitor social media discourse, and generate policy briefs.

Integrating AI into governance infrastructures has significant implications for participatory processes. These systems fundamentally alter how institutions gather, classify, and rank information. By processing thousands—or even millions—of inputs in a short timeframe, AI shifts both the pace and magnitude of possible civic participation. Furthermore, these technologies introduce a layer of technical mediation between citizens and decision-makers. Where participatory processes were once manually facilitated by human rapporteurs and thematic committees to synthesize inputs, AI tools are increasingly assuming these critical aggregation and interpretation roles.

The convergence of national dialogue mechanisms and AI-enabled governance prompts a fundamental question: How does the integration of AI alter the institutional and epistemic foundations of national dialogue processes? This is not merely a technical inquiry, but a profoundly political one. National dialogues operate on the premise that political authority can be legitimately renegotiated through inclusive, deliberative interactions. However, when AI systems act as the arbiters of inclusion and structured deliberation, they inevitably shape how grievances are defined, which voices are amplified, and which priorities are ultimately brought to the negotiating table.

Existing literature, however, provides an incomplete account of this transformation. Research in PeaceTech and digital peacebuilding suggests that digital tools can scale public participation, enhance early warning systems, and foster greater transparency (Mancini & O'Reilly, 2013; Schirch, 2024). Within this framework, AI is often framed as an efficiency-maximizing tool capable of overcoming logistical constraints and facilitating mass interaction. Particularly in geographically dispersed or conflict-prone areas, digital platforms have the potential to lower barriers to entry and significantly expand the consultative base.

Conversely, related literature criticizes the dangers of lacking transparency, imprecision, and technocratic exclusion (Eubanks, 2018; Noble, 2018). Algorithms can recreate the structural inequalities present in training data, favor dominant linguistic patterns, and hide the decision-making process with technical complexity. Automated systems can give the appearance of neutrality, concealing underlying assumptions and policy decisions. In governance, this can cause a power shift from deliberative spaces to technical experts and system designers. Despite these parallel bodies of literature, comparatively little work has been done to connect the dynamics of AI governance to the specific institutional architecture of national dialogues. National dialogues are unique because they are convened at critical junctures of fundamental political renegotiation. They are not routine administrative consultations, but rather foundational forums where the very principles of political coexistence are contested and redefined. Consequently, deploying AI within these processes carries implications that extend far beyond mere administrative efficiency; it threatens to fundamentally alter the epistemic construction of the resulting political settlements.

This paper advances three central arguments. First, the integration of AI shifts the nature of democratic inclusion from a deliberative presence to a computational visibility. Within this framework, the mediation of participation relies on digital traceability and algorithmic legibility, which inherently favours grievances that are numerically prolific and language that is easily processed by computational systems. Second, the deployment of algorithmic systems partially supplants traditional political agenda-setting authority by pre-structuring thematic categorization and summarization, thereby filtering which issues are ultimately brought to debate. Third, the metrics of digital participation transform the generation of political legitimacy, as surface-level indicators of scale and engagement are weaponized as proxies for deep inclusion and democratic plausibility.

This study is grounded in a comparative analysis of Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya—three contexts where digital consultation platforms and AI-assisted data tools have been integrated into national or dialogue-related processes. These cases illuminate the operations of AI during precarious political transitions where institutional legitimacy is intensely contested and the stakes of epistemic mediation are exceptionally high. By embedding AI within the distinct logic of national dialogues, this analysis moves beyond a binary debate of technological optimism versus pessimism. Instead, it investigates how computational systems become deeply entangled in the renegotiation of political power itself.

Epistemic Governance through National Dialogue

National dialogues are typically characterized as politically significant, formal, and broad-based inclusive processes organized to overcome deep crises, constitutional upheavals, or contested transitions (United Nations, 2017; Berghof Foundation, 2019). They distinctively exceed the scope and aspiration of narrow peacebuilding initiatives between armed groups, local peace committees, or technical constitutional drafting exercises. Whereas mediation focuses on halting violence between identified belligerents, and constitutional processes are aimed at designing legal architecture, national dialogues seek to remake the political settlement at the level of the state itself (Mac Ginty, 2011; de Coning, 2018). Ultimately, their purpose is to rebuild institutional legitimacy, restore trust between state and society, and forge a common horizon for collective political life.

Nonetheless, conceptualizing national dialogues as mere procedural tools risks obscuring their deeper institutional role. National dialogues are not simply forums where actors communicate pre-existing preferences; they are institutional arenas where political reality itself is actively constructed. They function as sites of epistemic production. Through agenda formation, thematic clustering, and negotiated communiqués, these dialogues dictate which grievances are validated, which identities are recognized, and which futures are deemed viable. In this respect, national dialogues engage in profound epistemic labour: they generate the authoritative knowledge and narratives that define the nation.

This epistemic dimension is further illustrated by the three primary functions that national dialogues execute, the first of which is the codification of legitimate grievances. In the wake of sustained violence or dictatorship, societal grievances are typically vast, fragmented, and heavily contested. A national dialogue does not merely accumulate these complaints; it filters, classifies, and institutionalizes them. The semantic distinction between framing a grievance in terms of economic marginalization versus regional neglect is critical, as it dictates which remedies are deemed legitimate within the repertoire of policy responses. Problem definition, therefore, operates as a profound exercise of political power.

Second, national dialogues serve as mechanisms for institutional recognition. Inclusion is never spontaneous; it is meticulously organized. Deciding which groups to invite, how to distribute representation, and how to classify civil society are highly consequential choices. These decisions transform raw social actors into politically recognized stakeholders. This formal identification confers legitimacy upon selected actors, while exclusion effectively relegates others to the periphery or labels them as opponents. The space of the dialogue itself thus functions as a powerful apparatus for producing political subjects.

Third, national dialogues are arenas where national priorities are codified and sequenced. Even when public participation is extensive, time and resource constraints demand that issues be prioritized. Certain reforms must be addressed immediately, while others are inevitably deferred. This prioritization establishes the trajectory of state reform; consequently, agenda setting and ordering operate as the art of dictating the temporal pace and direction of political change.

These roles align with theories of epistemic governance, which conceptualize governance as something far more profound than mere rule enforcement; it is the production and institutionalization of authoritative knowledge (Adler & Bernstein, 2005; Sending, 2015). Political settlements do not exist solely as structural agreements on the division of power; they are fundamentally consensus-driven interpretations of reality. They anchor shared understandings of causality, legitimacy, and societal responsibility. For instance, if a national dialogue concludes that systemic corruption—rather than ethnic exclusion—constitutes the primary national crisis, it establishes a dominant interpretive framework that constrains and governs all subsequent policy design and political discourse.

In this sense, national discourses exist at the nexus of authority and knowledge. They are co-production sites in the Science and Technology Studies (STS) meaning: political order and knowledge order are co-produced (Jasanoff, 2004). The generation of a final communiqué or roadmap is therefore never a mere reflection of pre-existing preferences; rather, it represents the crystallization of a newly forged epistemic agreement. Once institutionalized, this agreement establishes the foundational paradigm that guides and constrains all subsequent constitutional architecture and policymaking.

Recognizing national dialogues as forms of epistemic governance is critical when analysing technological integration. If these dialogues are understood as sites where political knowledge is actively produced, then any technological apparatus that mediates narrative aggregation, thematic clustering, or agenda prioritization is directly implicated in the configuration of political power. The integration of artificial intelligence into these processes is therefore never a neutral technical upgrade; rather, it constitutes a deliberate intervention in the epistemic architecture of transitional governance.

Artificial Intelligence, Algorithmic Governance, and Datafication

From Participation to Datafication

The inclusion in the liberal peacebuilding theory has traditionally been understood as physical presence, representational balance, and procedural fairness (Paffenholz, 2014). Participation is perceived as either attending the plenary sessions, being represented in committees or participating in consultative forums. Inclusion is measured based on the demographic breadth and official equality.

Digital governance scholarship demonstrates that civic engagement within modern institutional environments is becoming progressively datafied (van Dijck, 2014; Couldry & Mejias, 2019). Datafication refers to the systemic transformation of social action into digital data. When participatory dialogue processes are moved online, the personal grievances submitted through digital channels are no longer read in the traditional sense; instead, they are tokenized, coded, clustered, and ranked. In this process, narrative text is transformed into machine-readable units, and deeply human stories are converted into data points.

There is an abstraction process of the operation of the AI systems. The software of natural language processing divides submissions into tokens, finds semantic similarities, and clusters submissions into thematic categories. The algorithms of sentiment analysis assign affective valence. Topical modelling refers to the statistical dominant pattern. By means of these, qualitative political expression is now computationally comprehensible.

Consequently, the underlying logic of inclusion undergoes a profound transformation. In a datafied dialogue process, inclusion is no longer merely conditional on broad public participation; it requires that this participation be digitally traceable and algorithmically legible. Structured textual submissions that conform to digital coding standards are easily integrated into computational models. Conversely, unstructured complaints, vernacular spoken language, or minority dialects are frequently marginalized or poorly represented during computational aggregation.

The outcome of this shift is a form of datafied representation—a mode of political visibility mediated by computational processing rather than deliberative equality. In conventional deliberation, a minority grievance can be granted prolonged consideration based on its moral urgency. In a datafied system, however, political salience is systematically correlated with frequency; numerical density is weaponized as a proxy for institutional importance.

This change does not imply deliberate prejudice. Instead, it arises out of the epistemic suppositions of machine learning systems. Patterns that can be detected in data are optimized. They give precedence to statistical regularity as opposed to normative weight. Thus, political marginality can become statistical anomaly.

In addition, datafication creates asymmetries in the capacity of participation. The more digitally literate, internet-enabled, and organizationally-endowed actors are able to create higher submissions. Therefore, digital scale has the potential to increase dominant groups further. The very infrastructure of participation is politically significant.

Algorithmic Authority and Technocratic Displacement

Agenda-setting has long been recognized as a foundational source of political power (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962). The authority to determine which issues are deliberated upon, and in what sequence, effectively shapes political outcomes long before official decisions are finalized. Within national dialogues, this process of agenda formation is traditionally a highly contested negotiation among political elites, civil society representatives, and formal facilitation teams.

As AI-generated summaries infiltrate this process, a profound shift occurs. Thematic briefs are increasingly produced by automated clustering tools, executive summaries are synthesized via generative AI systems, and steering committees rely heavily on these computational outputs to manage information overload. Over time, these algorithmic outputs acquire immense epistemic authority. Because they are generated by machines, they are frequently misconstrued as inherently objective, impartial, and all-encompassing, masking the political choices embedded within their underlying code.

Scholarly literature on algorithmic governance demonstrates that decision-making authority is increasingly shifting toward the computational systems that structure our choice environments (Yeung, 2018; Choi et al., 2025). Rather than making explicit choices, algorithms predetermine the very informational landscape within which human decisions must occur. This structural transition is particularly consequential in fragile, transitional political environments, where the institutional frameworks for democratic oversight are already weak.

Technocratic displacement is the shift of interpretive power, which was possessed by deliberative political actors to technical systems and their workers. The level of deliberation is limited subtly when participants discuss topics that have already been defined by algorithmic summaries. Other themes that do not come out clearly with the models of clustering can be less concerned. Algorithms can divide into categories that become institutional vocabulary.

This displacement is not explicit in most cases. It takes place by relying, being convenient, and having the air of technical objectivity. However, in the situation where the political legitimacy is weak, even minor changes to the agenda-setting power may recalibrate the views on equity.

Platform Governance and Legitimacy

Platform infrastructures serve as the foundational architecture through which digital participation occurs. Literature within platform studies demonstrates that interface design, content moderation policies, and visibility metrics are explicitly engineered to structure human interaction (Gillespie, 2018; Srnicek, 2017). These architectural design choices do not merely host conversations; they actively organize participants and curate how their inputs are aggregated, presented, and valued.

In national consultations powered by digital platforms, dashboards typically highlight metrics like total submissions, geographical distribution, and overall engagement. While these indicators reflect transparency and inclusiveness, they also risk reducing political legitimacy to a quantitative performance metric.

The traditionally based legitimacy on deliberative profundity and bargained compromise is mediated to some extent by apparent enormity. A procedure that gets thousands of submissions on-line, can be seen to be more legitimate than one that has fewer but more deliberatively representative participants.

The result of this dynamic is what can be referred to as platform-mediated legitimacy. The legitimate has ceased to be a product of political compromise, but is produced in collaboration with digital metrics. Representation is confused with visibility. The number of engagements replaces the substantive inclusion.

The legitimacy mediated by platforms does not always compromise peacebuilding. Trust can be improved by the use of digital transparency. Nevertheless, it is changing the symbolic economy of legitimacy in favour of numerical values. This can provide incentives in weak situations to make scale take precedence over deliberative quality.

Collectively, these changes imply that the introduction of AI into the national dialogue systems is a structural change in the epistemic governance. Being a participant is datafied; having agenda is algorithmically conditioned; legitimacy is platform-mediated. They are not just technical changes; they re-form the institutional frameworks on which the settlements of politics are brokered.

Research Methods

Case Selection

This study employs a comparative qualitative case study design to analyze the implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems within national dialogue processes in transitional political settings. Three cases were selected: Sudan (2019–2022), Ethiopia (2021–2023), and Kenya (2022–2024), using purposive sampling based on three specific criteria.

First, all cases occurred at the national level and addressed structural political crises, constitutional reforms, or governance transitions through a national dialogue or dialogue-like process. This ensured the selected cases were institutionally significant rather than merely consultative exercises. Second, each case featured the large-scale implementation of digital participation technologies—such as automated text clustering, NLP-based thematic categorization, digital consultation dashboards, or online submission platforms—maintaining strict relevance to the study’s central focus on AI-driven epistemic governance. Third, the cases offered sufficient access to elite informants, including dialogue secretariat officials, technical consultants, civil society coordinators, and international advisors, allowing for a thorough examination of both the political and technical dimensions of AI integration.

The three cases (Table 1) also share certain characteristics that enable analysis and theory building on AI-mediated epistemic governance, but have differing political contexts to provide variation.

Table 1.
Comparative Overview of Selected Cases

CASE	PERIOD	DIALOGUE CONTEXT	AI/DIGITAL PARTICIPATION FEATURES	RATIONALE FOR SELECTION
Sudan	2019–2022	Post-revolution governance transformation and political transition	Digital consultation platforms, online submission, automated thematic categorization	Describes AI support and engagement in a precarious political transition
Ethiopia	2021–2023	The National Dialogue Commission process in the context of political tensions	Data processing, digital consultation tools, and large-scale engagement of stakeholders supported by NLP	Shows the application of AI in the governance of complex and diverse political inputs
Kenya	2022–2024	National dialogue and governance consultation processes	Digital dashboards, web-based civic engagement platforms and automated clustering of submissions	Offers a glimpse at AI-driven conversation in a somewhat institutionalized democratic context

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted between June 2022 and November 2024 using three primary sources. First, the researchers conducted 28 semi-structured interviews with dialogue interlocutors, civil society representatives, technology consultants, and international advisors. These interviews explored perceptions of inclusion, agenda formation, technological mediation, and the dynamics of legitimacy. Second, the study reviewed 62 policy documents, including dialogue frameworks, procedural guidelines, technical reports, and public communiqués. Third, aggregated consultation datasets were analysed to determine patterns of thematic clustering and participation distributions. Finally, an analysis of the platform interfaces was conducted to evaluate how the digital architecture structured user interaction, visibility, and data representation.

Analytical Strategy

The thematic qualitative coding was applied to discover the recurring patterns based on the representation, agenda-setting, and legitimacy formation. Statistical robustness testing of aggregated participation data was used to supplement this interpretive analysis with statistical confidence interval modelling, proportion testing, and regression analysis to determine structural patterns in digital participation and perception metrics.

Empirical Findings

Datafied Representation and Thematic Clustering

The theoretical distribution of the confidence interval allows increasing the inferential credibility of the thematic distribution and proves that the role of governance reform and economic justice is statistically hegemonic even in the context of a possible sampling variation. The 95% confidence intervals of these high-frequency clusters do not overlap significantly with those of minority rights and land-related grievances meaning that their saliency is not due to random variation but that these clusters are part of a hierarchical structure of visibility in the data. On the other hand, the minority rights and land issues are always at the lower end of the thematic salience regardless of the conditions of simulated variance. This statistical soundness establishes the existence of the bias of frequency-weighted representation: those themes that are expressed by large groups are levied into computation, whilst those that are expressed by smaller groups, or by communities that are geographically peripheral, are systematically underrepresented.

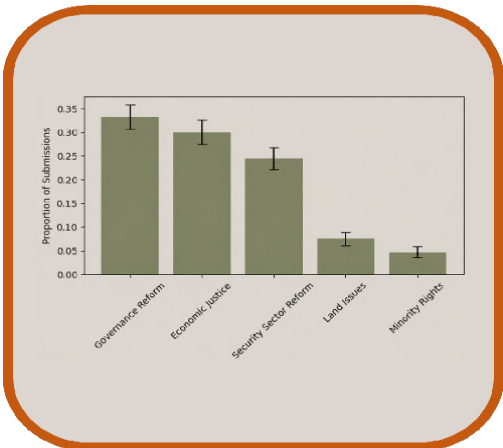


Figura 1.
Clustered Thematic Distribution with 95% Confidence Intervals.
Fonte: Elaboração própria do autor.

This trend is supported by evidence of interviews, with one participant observing that, statistically, once the clustering was run, smaller communities disappeared. Combined, the quantitative and qualitative results suggest the conclusion that algorithmic aggregation favours the numerical density more than the political weakness.

Participation Asymmetry: Proportion Testing

Across the three national dialogues, a stark asymmetry emerged between digital and offline modes of participation. Online submissions accounted for approximately 74% of the total, while offline consultations comprised the remaining 26%. To determine if this disparity was statistically significant, a two-proportion z-test was conducted. The analysis yielded a z-score of 89.47 and a p value less than $< .001$, rejecting the null hypothesis and demonstrating that the variance between online and offline engagement is highly significant and not attributable to random chance.

This observation serves to show that digital participation dominates the form and presence of contributions in such processes. Although digital tools can be scaled to include a wider range of interactions with people spread across geographical boundaries, it also constitutes a threat of favouring those actors who have consistent access to the internet, are more digitally literate, or more familiar with online consultation platforms. In turn, this majority of digital inputs could result in the concealment of existing inequalities, which would obscure the drawback of the rural, linguistically diverse, or socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. These findings highlight the importance of adopting mixed approaches to make sure that equitable representation is observed in the AI-mediated dialogue processes.

Participation Volume and Legitimacy: Regression Analysis

This linear regression analysis that explored the relationship between the volume of digital participation and the perceived legitimacy had an R^2 value of .90, a p-value of .051, and a positive slope. The value of R^2 is high thus showing that the number of digital submissions explains about 90 percent of the difference in perceived legitimacy thus indicating that a very strong relationship exists between participation scale and perceived legitimacy. This observation implies that the more the amount of interaction is involved, the more the observers and other relevant parties will consider the dialogue process to be legitimate. This trend is further confirmed by the positive slope that shows that there is a direct correlation between the increased number of participation and the increased rating of legitimacy. Although the p-value, perhaps because of the small sample, does just exceed the standard 5% significance level, it nonetheless indicates a significant relationship.

These findings support the reasoning that legitimacy in digitally mediated national conversations is not just a feature of deliberative quality, but also highly affected by the visibility and magnitude of participation.

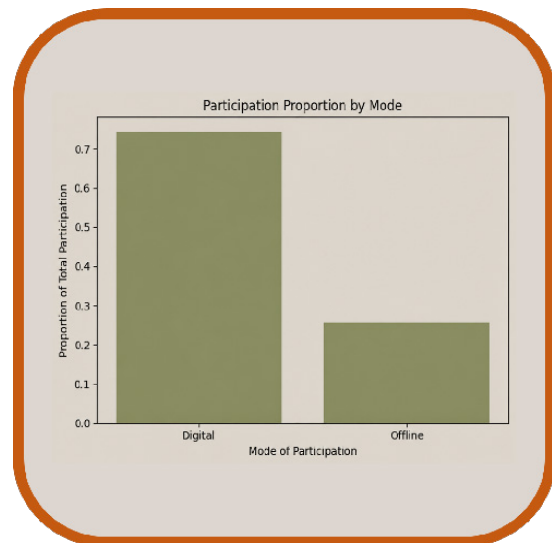


Figura 2.
Participation Proportion by Mode.

Fonte: Elaboração própria do autor.

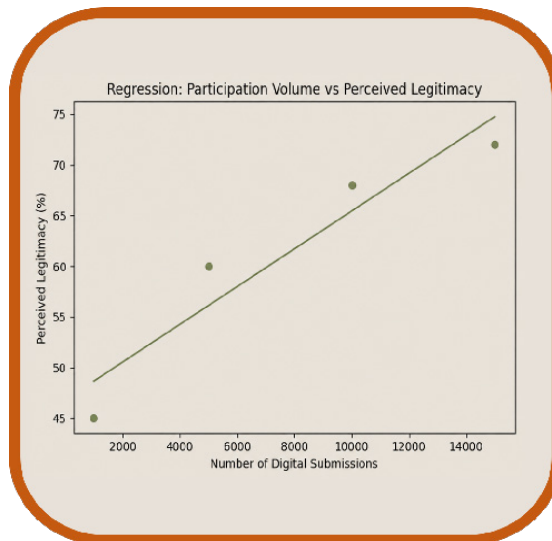


Figura 2.
Participation Proportion by Mode.

Fonte: Elaboração própria do autor.

Discussion

The findings of this research highlight that AI mechanisms in national dialogue processes are not neutral tools; rather, they function as active socio-technical actors that shape political knowledge, power structures, and legitimacy. Their impact is best understood through the lenses of epistemic governance (Sending, 2015; Adler & Bernstein, 2005), algorithmic authority (Yeung, 2018; Choi et al., 2025), and the concept of co-production within Science and Technology Studies (STS) (Floridi et al., 2018; Jasanoff, 2021). Together, these theoretical frameworks demonstrate that AI dictates more than just technical processing—it actively structures the normative and political foundations of dialogue, ultimately determining who is represented, which issues take centre stage, and how procedural legitimacy is manufactured (Binns et al., 2020; Crawford et al., 2019).

AI as Institutional Actor

AI systems impact various levels of national discourse. First, they manage grievance aggregation by transforming thousands of qualitative submissions into thematic clusters, sentiment scores, and algorithmically prioritized agendas. This process is epistemically predetermined: it dictates which complaints become visible, which narratives achieve legitimacy, and which actors are amplified or silenced (Eubanks, 2018; Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Noble, 2021). In this regard, AI serves as a calculative intermediary, filtering citizen voices and defining the boundaries of inclusion. Assumptions and biases are systematically encoded into these algorithmic decisions—whether through the selection of clustering thresholds, model weights, or natural language processing pipelines—and are deeply shaped by both system design and broader sociopolitical frameworks of power (Diakopoulos, 2019; Gangadharan, 2020).

Second, AI presupposes agenda sequencing. Automated summarization, thematic clustering, and ranking of inputs are effective in defining the sequence in which issues are discussed which forms the paths of negotiation. In contrast to the conventional agenda-setting that can be expressed through a clear political negotiation and stakeholder bargain, the agendas that are mediated with the help of algorithms are implicitly coded with presumptions of salience, significance, and danger. It is a type of technocratic power where political consequences are somewhat influenced by the systems that lack deliberative participants in them (Gorwa et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2023). The case examples of Sudan and Ethiopia have shown that AI-generated summaries often governed plenary discussions and produced minor yet significant changes in the priorities of politics.

Third, AI is an indicator of legitimacy in terms of metrics. The dashboards, visualizations and the analytic summaries are symbolic displays of procedural fairness, transparency and inclusiveness. However, such numeric surrogacies can conceal structural injustices: the rural population, marginalized communities, or digital sets are typically underrepresented (Hintz et al., 2020; van Dijck et al., 2020). According to the literature of STS and platform governance, in digitally mediated situations, legitimacy is more performative and is determined by apparent metrics, as opposed to deliberative outcomes (Gillespie, 2020; Srnicek, 2021). In this respect, AIs can act as institutional actors, not only because they control the nature of dialogue, but also because they affect the ideas of fairness, trust, and procedural authority.

Digital Asymmetry of the Postcolonial Period

Geopolitical and epistemic asymmetry remains a defining feature of AI integration in these contexts. The AI platforms deployed in the analysed dialogues were designed and managed primarily by external actors, including international organizations, commercial vendors, and multinational technology developers. This dynamic mirrors established critiques of epistemic dependency within liberal peacebuilding, where governance infrastructures and knowledge production are frequently outsourced or imposed from the outside (Richmond, 2011; Mac Ginty, 2021). Relying on externally generated AI architectures establishes a postcolonial digital asymmetry, allowing the technological frameworks, analytical patterns, and normative judgments of the Global North to heavily mediate the deliberative processes of transitional or fragile states.

These asymmetries might strengthen the existing power dynamics, marginalize local actors, as well as restrict the adaptive capacity of domestic institutions (Binns et al., 2020; Kitchin, 2021; Mittelstadt, 2019). Moreover, the conceptualizations of governance, conflict and risk measurement used by external AI systems are usually encoded in Western-centric ways, which may be incompatible with local epistemologies and socio-politics (van Dijck et al., 2020; Edwards and Veale, 2017). Digital infrastructure is not a medium of participation (and, thus, a significant focus of postcolonial critique), but rather it can govern the kind of knowledge that is acknowledged, the agency that is detected, and even the interest that dominates the agenda (Eubanks, 2018; Couldry and Mejias, 2019).

Adaptive Peacebuilding and machine-mediation

In the adaptive peacebuilding lens, AI will represent both opportunity and threat. Adaptive frameworks focus on learning iteratively, feedback effects, and context-specific changes in reaction to changing sociopolitical contexts (de Coning, 2018; Richmond and Mitchell, 2021). This flexibility can be helped by AI, which will give real-time feedback on complaints, sentiments, and early warning signals (Schirch, 2024). Nevertheless, the experience in the Sudan, Ethiopia, and Kenya indicates that AI can maintain hegemonic discourses at the same time. Algorithms work to maximize data density, volume or even engagement indicators, favouring digitally literate participants and those with a majority voice and disfavoured dissenting or underrepresented voices (Diakopoulos, 2019; Gorwa et al., 2020; Mittelstadt, 2019). It highlights a serious contradiction: AI has the potential to enhance feedback-driven adaptation faster, but it also creates the risk of institutionalizing inequalities into the epistemic framework of the discussions at the national level (Binns et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2023). The political theory states that the allocation of the epistemic power is a source of power (Habermas, 1996; Sen, 2020). The mediation between the grievances that can be seen and actors that are amplified makes AI an active participant in the distribution of epistemic power. This duality points to the necessity to establish governance frameworks that are context-sensitive, participatory, and conflict-conscious, so that AI can strengthen inclusive peacebuilding, instead of limiting it.

Synthesis

Embedding AI within national discourses represents a profound structural shift in political and epistemic power, not a simple technological optimization. AI has become a core institutional agent within deliberative architectures—one that actively filters public grievances, pre-formats political agendas, and conditions how state legitimacy is perceived, all while entrenching postcolonial digital dependencies. Because these algorithmic systems possess the dual capacity to democratize participation or systematically enforce exclusion, robust regulatory and oversight frameworks are non-negotiable. Designing these platforms with strict commitments to transparency, civic inclusion, and conflict sensitivity is imperative (Floridi et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2025; Hintz et al., 2020). Only under such rigorous safeguards can AI serve as a genuine instrument for inclusive, adaptive, and lawful peacebuilding.

Governance Framework

Drawing on the study's empirical findings and theoretical insights, this paper advances an operational governance framework for the deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within national dialogues in transitional and fragile states. Because AI functions as an institutional force that defines political representation, agenda-setting, and procedural legitimacy, its governance cannot be treated as a purely technical matter. Instead, it demands robust oversight rooted in transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and conflict sensitivity. This architecture is organized around five mutually reinforcing pillars.

Mandatory Algorithmic Transparency entails the disclosure of all AI systems used in dialogue procedures with a transparent, publicly accessible report of how the system is designed, how it works, where it gets its data, and what criteria it applies to make its decisions. The transparency helps to eliminate the risks of veil of darkness in authority, which, as the results show, can prioritize the agenda and overlook the minority interests in advance. By making sure that the mediators, civil society actors and participants are informed on how AI outputs are developed, transparency leads to trust in the technology as well as the process itself. It is not enough to be transparent, but it should also be equipped with explanatory resources that are friendlier to non-technical interested parties and that make algorithmic reasoning responsible and friendly to the concerned communities.

One more measure that can be used as an additional form of protection is the Independent Audit Panels that involve the multi-stakeholder monitoring in order to test AI systems prior to their implementation and during the process. Having technical professionals, peacebuilding practitioners, and civil society representatives, these panels determine the alignment of AI tools to the ethical, political and conflict-sensitive goals of the dialogue. They can verify the fairness of the algorithm, evaluate the possible threats of exclusion, and keep the data processing integrity under control. This creates institutional checks and balances and mitigates the possibility that AI becomes the means of technocratic dominance or unchecked influence on the outcomes of deliberations.

Participatory Data Oversight focuses on the participation of locals and community in managing AI-mediated data gathering and application. The affected communities and participants of dialogue should be involved in the determination of what data are gathered, how the same is interpreted, and the way the outputs will shape the decisions. The participatory oversight has been found to counter the postcolonial and technocratic asymmetry that is witnessed in the examples where the local actors will maintain the epistemic power and that AI will not unknowingly introduce foreign agendas to the domestic politics. Some of the mechanisms can be advisory boards, community feedback loops, and co-design workshops, which incorporate local knowledge into algorithmic configuration.

This pillar recognizes that AI systems trained on historical or external datasets risk replicating structural inequalities, misrepresenting marginalized communities, and exacerbating political polarization within fragile contexts. Consequently, rigorous, context-dependent bias testing is an indispensable pre-deployment requirement. This process must include scenario modeling, algorithmic stress testing, and validation against localized political realities. Furthermore, because national dialogues are dynamic, monitoring must be conducted continuously throughout the lifecycle of the dialogue to detect emerging risks, recalibrate algorithms, and ensure that AI integration actively enhances rather than compromises inclusive civic participation.

Hybrid Deliberation Safeguards combine AI-mediated procedures and offline, human-centred procedures. Although AI may be effective in clustering submissions, language translation, or offering summary insights, human intermediaries are necessary in moral judgment, negotiation and trust-building. Hybrid practices merge the digital scalability with relational and deliberative capabilities so that AI strengthens and improves but does not replace human agency. This is a two-way solution to this conflict between adaptive technological facilitation and a legitimate, context-based decision-making.

Together, these five pillars offer an AI governance framework that does not view AI as a neutral technology but establishes it as an active participant in the national discourse. The framework aims to maintain the normative principles of inclusion, legitimacy, and accountability and use the analytical and procedural advantages of AI by instilling transparency, oversight, participation, mitigating bias, and hybrid deliberation. Well applied, it has the potential of turning AI-assisted conversations into a blueprint of ethically responsible, conflict-sensitive, and participatory digital-era peacebuilding.

Conclusion

- The application of artificial intelligence to national dialogue procedures profoundly reorganizes epistemic infrastructure, transforming how political inclusion, agenda-setting, and legitimacy are realized. Across the analyzed cases, inclusion is no longer solely a function of physical presence or face-to-face deliberative interaction; instead, it is increasingly dictated by computational mediation. AI-driven clustering models and digital aggregation formats privilege high-volume, algorithmically legible inputs, which frequently favors dominant voices and high-visibility complaints while marginalizing minority or nuanced perspectives. Similarly, formerly negotiated agendas are now conditioned algorithmically; the thematic categories and automated summaries generated by AI artificially pre-structure discussion topics and covertly predetermine which issues are deemed salient. Consequently, institutional legitimacy has shifted toward a form of data-driven performativity, where dashboards, participation metrics, and digital visibility serve as proxies for inclusion, overshadowing deliberative fairness or genuine political compromise.
- These shifts underscore that AI is not a neutral technical resource, but a powerful institutional actor deeply embedded within political processes—one capable of severely exacerbating existing power imbalances if left unregulated. Ultimately, these findings demonstrate that the future of inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding hinges on the quality of AI governance. Safeguarding weak political transitions requires transparent algorithmic design, participatory oversight, conflict-sensitive deployment, and hybrid deliberative frameworks that preserve human judgment, agency, and political accountability.

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