

Imen Ameer and Jose Luis Carvalho

Building a Global Coalition for Human-Centered Governance

Process, Oversight, and Technology
in Context

DIGITAL TRUST | AI & PARTICIPATION | GOVERNANCE SAFEGUARDS



© 2025 The Digital Economist. All rights reserved.

This publication is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means—including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods—without the prior written permission of The Digital Economist, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews or certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

For permission requests, please contact:

The Digital Economist

Email: info@thedigitaleconomist.com
Website: www.thedigitaleconomist.com



Abstract

This paper examines the principles and practicalities of human-centered governance in the digital age. Drawing on lessons from global coalitions, digital governance initiatives, and participatory systems design, it argues that although human-centered approaches aim to place people at the core of decision-making, they must also be anchored in structured processes, oversight mechanisms, and contextual relevance. Through an analysis of coalition-building, civic engagement, and the responsible integration of technology, this paper proposes a governance model that is adaptive, inclusive, and responsive. Finally, it considers the potential for symbiotic collaboration between humans and AI agents while emphasizing the indispensable role of human judgment.





Introduction

Governance systems are undergoing a profound transformation driven by digital technologies, shifting citizen expectations, and the growing interdependencies of the global system. The impact of technology on governance is bi-directional. On one side, tools such as artificial intelligence (AI) can reduce administrative friction and enhance transparency when applied responsibly. On the other hand, these same technologies require governance to evolve, ensuring their use remains within the boundaries of human-centered practice.

In this moment of disruption and opportunity, the idea of human-centered governance offers a powerful response: a vision in which people are not merely beneficiaries or users but active co-creators. Yet centering people does not mean removing structure or abandoning accountability. Instead, it demands the thoughtful integration of process, oversight, and human input at all levels.

Estonia's digital identity system illustrates this duality. More than 99 percent of public services are available online, enabling citizens to vote, pay taxes, and access health records securely within minutes (e-Estonia 2023). This system has dramatically reduced administrative friction—Estonia estimates it saves over 2 percent of GDP annually in efficiency gains—while maintaining strong legal safeguards and transparency rules (OECD 2020). This case demonstrates that human-centered governance is not abstract but measurable in outcomes that matter to both citizens and policymakers.

At the same time, global trust in institutions remains fragile. The Edelman Trust Barometer (2023) shows that while 76 percent of citizens trusted technology in 2019, that figure had fallen to 67 percent by 2023, and trust in government remains below 50 percent in most democracies (Edelman 2023). This divergence underscores the urgency of embedding human-centered safeguards as digital systems expand.

Human-centered governance rests on the principle that dignity, agency, and participation must shape the design and implementation of policy. It acknowledges the vital role of education, local knowledge, and ethical oversight, even as it embraces the promise of emerging technologies. This approach calls for a new social contract built not only on democratic ideals but also on inclusive innovation, equitable access, and a culture of co-responsibility.



1.

Defining Human-Centered Governance

Human-centered governance is an emerging paradigm grounded in participatory democracy, design thinking, and technological accountability. It seeks to place people's lived experiences, aspirations, and needs at the heart of governance structures. According to the OECD (2020), it emphasizes inclusive engagement, iterative processes, and decision-making tailored to context (e-Estonia 2023).

A systemic model of governance integrates individual, community, and societal perspectives. A truly human-centered system recognizes that governance is not only about rules or outcomes but also about relationships. It must be dynamic, transparent, and reflexive. Importantly, while decentralizing authority to better engage communities, it must also retain clear processes for accountability, evaluation, and legitimacy.

Current definitions vary by actor. The OECD defines human-centered governance as "a model of accountability and equity that places citizen trust at its core" (OECD 2020). The UNDP emphasizes inclusivity and resilience in fragile states (UNDP 2023). In contrast, private-sector frameworks, such as IDEO's *Human-Centered Design Guide*, emphasize efficiency and user experience while civil society groups such as Access Now stress dignity and rights-based protections. These definitional tensions illustrate why a unified framework is necessary.

Taken together, these perspectives show both overlap and fragmentation: multilateral organizations emphasize accountability and equity; private-sector actors highlight design and efficiency; and civil society emphasizes dignity, empowerment, and inclusion. This diversity underscores the urgency of developing a shared framework to avoid conceptual fragmentation.

What is missing in current governance models is not only the inclusion of lived experience but also the structured recognition of accountability gaps, weak oversight mechanisms, and the exclusion of marginalized communities. Human-centered governance thus emerges as both a corrective and a visionary model (OECD 2020).



2.

The Role of Process and Oversight

Processes are the backbone of any governance system. In human-centered models, they must be flexible enough to allow adaptation while remaining strong enough to preserve trust and legitimacy. Examples include participatory design methods, community consultations, iterative policy cycles, and embedded feedback loops.

For instance, Taiwan's participatory budgeting experiments engaged more than 250,000 citizens between 2016 and 2021, reducing community conflict and increasing satisfaction with municipal governance by 18 percent, according to survey evaluations (Wampler 2022). Such cases demonstrate that structured participation not only legitimizes decisions but measurably improves outcomes.

Oversight, including the metaphoric “guardrails,” is essential to ensure that even collaborative or adaptive governance remains accountable. Human oversight should be multi-level, spanning from local communities to formal institutions. Mechanisms such as metrics, public review processes, and citizen advisory boards help maintain legitimacy. Breaking these levels down into local, national, and transnational oversight councils with clear mandates and evaluation scorecards ensures consistent checks across scales.

Crucially, the oversight process must center human judgment. As AI tools become more integrated into decision-making, it is tempting to over-rely on algorithms. Yet algorithms lack moral intuition, contextual nuance, and cultural awareness. Human judgment remains the ultimate checkpoint.





3.

Technology, Trust, and Context

Technology functions as both an enabler and a risk in governance systems. When designed and governed responsibly, it can expand access, transparency, and engagement. Left unchecked, however, it can entrench bias, amplify exclusion, and erode public trust. Human-centered governance therefore insists on deploying technology in ways that are context-aware, ethically aligned, and anchored in trust.

For technology to support human-centered governance, trust must be intentionally cultivated between systems and the human stakeholders who interact with them. Research shows that trust in any relationship typically rests on four key pillars: competence, integrity, benevolence, and predictability. These apply equally to the human-technology relationship:

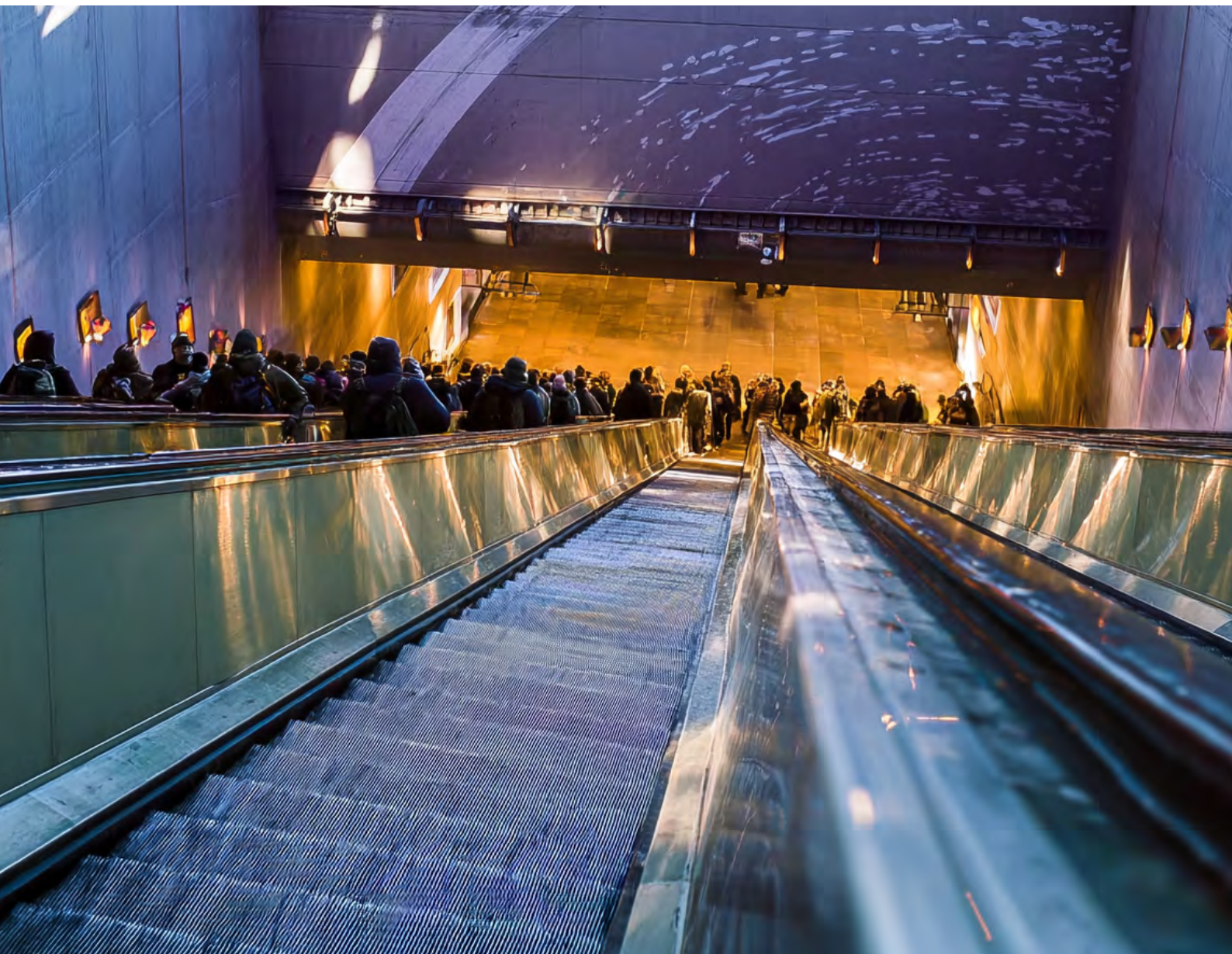
- **Competence:** Systems must reliably deliver on their promises, demonstrating technical excellence and consistent performance. This means not only functioning as intended but also adapting to evolving needs and incorporating feedback.
- **Integrity:** Ethical behavior, transparency, and adherence to clear values are essential. Technology should be governed by transparent policies, with clear communication about its use, its strengths and limitations, and its handling of information.
- **Benevolence:** The intent behind technology must be to serve people, prioritizing user well-being, inclusivity, and fairness. This includes assessing the social impact of technological decisions and ensuring that marginalized voices are represented in design and implementation.
- **Predictability:** Consistency in outcomes and processes fosters confidence. Stakeholders must be able to anticipate how decisions are made and enforced; a loss of predictability is often the first sign of eroding trust.

Global trends reinforce these concerns. The Edelman Trust Barometer indicates that while trust in technology remains higher than in government, it has steadily declined, and citizens increasingly demand demonstrable safeguards in algorithmic systems. Embedding measurable trust pillars into governance is therefore not optional but essential.



Trust in technology is not a static asset but a dynamic process: it can be lost at any point and must be continuously earned and renewed through consistent action and open communication. Placing trust as a defining characteristic of technology design and governance—and framing technology as augmenting rather than replacing human capacity—can strengthen human-centered governance.

As technology becomes a critical tool for scaling global solutions, building coalitions around trusted technology may accelerate progress toward human-centered governance. Ultimately, trust emerges when people can understand, influence, and challenge the systems that govern them.





4.

Coalition Building for Human-Centered Governance

No single actor can realize the vision of human-centered governance alone. Coalition-building is essential. These coalitions must bridge sectors, regions, and disciplines—linking governments, civil society, academia, tech platforms, and community organizers.

The goal is not to replace existing coalitions but to strengthen them by weaving together localized efforts with global learning. Initiatives such as the Cyber Paratroopers (community-based civic tech oversight) and Poole (civic deliberation networks) demonstrate what is possible when people and platforms collaborate.

Coalition-building is not theoretical but already visible in practice. Estonia's e-governance model and Taiwan's vTaiwan deliberation platform illustrate how governments, technologists, and citizens can co-create trust and inclusivity. Other initiatives, such as New York City's Civic Engagement Commission (OECD 2020) and Poole's civic deliberation networks (UNCDP 2023), further illustrate this model across contexts.

Effective coalitions require explicit acknowledgement of inherent power disparities. For-profit actors contribute resources, data infrastructure, and scalability while non-profit actors provide legitimacy, advocacy, and grassroots trust. Balancing these contributions prevents dominance by corporate or state interests.

Recognizing that both contributions and benefits may differ, coalitions ultimately serve a greater purpose: advancing human-centered governance as a shared common good.

Finally, coalitions must prioritize awareness-building, particularly in underserved communities. Public literacy about governance, rights, and technologies is not a luxury—it is foundational to legitimacy. Education, open data, and shared platforms for participation can foster a culture of active citizenship.



5.

Implementation: From Design to Evaluation

Human-centered governance spans the entire policy cycle. It begins with co-design, continues through inclusive implementation, and culminates in participatory evaluation. At each stage, stakeholders must be representative, empowered, and well-informed.

Iterative frameworks such as Agile or adaptive governance provide useful models. These approaches enable rapid feedback, continuous learning, and responsive adaptation. Importantly, evaluation metrics should capture not only efficiency but also equity, inclusion, and lived experience.

The process itself should be humanizing—an opportunity to restore trust in institutions and reconnect people to power. Success is not measured solely by service delivery but by whether individuals feel seen, heard, and respected.

This humanizing element of governance can and should be measured. Structured feedback systems, stakeholder validation, and equity-based evaluations allow institutions to go beyond standard metrics and center lived experience. Participation metrics can assess who is involved in governance processes, how frequently they engage, and in what capacity. For instance, measuring whether historically marginalized groups are equitably included in consultations and decision-making bodies provides an important indicator of inclusive governance.

Trust and satisfaction surveys add another layer, gauging whether institutions are perceived as fair, transparent, and responsive. Tools such as the OECD Trust Survey Toolkit and the UNDP's Governance Indicators offer tested methodologies that can be adapted to local contexts, enabling governments to track shifts in public trust over time and identify when institutional practices fall short.

Indirect validation mechanisms also play a role. Community consultations, public deliberation forums, and independent audits can verify whether policies align with the real community needs. These iterative checks ensure that policies and governance are not reduced to box-ticking exercises but remain grounded in human dignity.



Equity and inclusion scorecards provide additional insight. Global models such as the World Bank's Human Capital Index, the UNDP's Multidimensional Poverty Index, or UN Women's Gender Equality Marker can be adapted to evaluate whether reforms are closing disparities or widening them.

Some experts propose developing a "Human Experience Score" (HXS), modeled after patient experience indices in healthcare systems. Such a score could capture perceptions of dignity, fairness, voice, and inclusion across the full governance cycle—from design to implementation to review.

Analogous indices in healthcare have shown measurable gains in institutional legitimacy by monitoring dignity and respect in patient care. A governance-focused HXS could serve a similar role, translating abstract ideals into practical tools for accountability.

Crucially, these metrics must be embedded in systemic governance evaluation frameworks rather than treated as symbolic add-ons. Citizen advisory boards, local feedback councils, and civic technology platforms can serve as real-time barometers of human-centeredness. Independent reviews conducted by civil society, academia, or ombudspersons further enhance accountability and safeguard inclusive practices.

As the UNDP (2023) notes, meaningful engagement "requires mechanisms of accountability that are not only formal but felt." The OECD's *Reinforcing Democracy Report* (2022) similarly underscores the need for "felt legitimacy"—the perception that institutions are not just legal authorities but rightful stewards of collective well-being.

In this sense, human-centered implementation becomes more than a technical process; it is a democratic practice. It is not about doing things *for* people, but *with* them, in ways that affirm their agency, voice, and dignity.



6.

Key Stakeholders in Human-Centered Governance

Human-centered governance requires not only abstract principles but clarity on who the stakeholders are, the roles they play, and how their interactions shape outcomes. Stakeholders can broadly be divided into for-profit, non-profit, public sector, and hybrid/multi-sector actors. Each group contributes distinct resources, perspectives, and forms of legitimacy while also introducing risks if their influence is unchecked.

6.1 For-Profit Stakeholders

Technology companies, financial institutions, and consultancies play central roles in shaping governance frameworks. Their opportunities lie in unmatched capacities to mobilize technical expertise, scale innovations rapidly, and channel resources toward governance challenges. Partnerships with governments or civil society can amplify participatory platforms or improve delivery. For instance, Microsoft’s “AI for Health” initiative, deployed in over 30 countries, has supported public health research and policy design, showing how corporate innovation can strengthen governance capacities when directed toward social good (e-Estonia 2023).

Yet risks emerge when market incentives dominate public priorities. Overconcentration of data and platforms in a few corporations creates “data monopolies” that undermine transparency and fairness. Google’s dominance in digital advertising and data analytics, for example, has triggered antitrust investigations in the US and Europe, raising concerns about whether private-sector scale erodes equitable and accountable governance (OECD 2020). Without strong safeguards, shareholder imperatives can diverge from human-centered values, leading to exclusionary or exploitative outcomes.

6.2 Non-Profit Stakeholders

Non-profits—including NGOs, advocacy groups, academic institutions, and community-based organizations (CBOs)—contribute legitimacy by amplifying marginalized voices and ensuring that dignity and equity remain central to governance. They often bring innovative, low-cost, and context-sensitive approaches, particularly through CBOs working at the community level. Transparency International, for instance, institutionalizes anti-corruption monitoring across borders through indices and watchdog mechanisms (Edelman 2023). Similarly, Access Now’s global advocacy for digital rights protects against exclusion and surveillance while promoting participatory governance (OECD 2020).



However, resource dependency and donor-driven agendas can limit sustainability and long-term influence. The opportunity lies in building durable bridges between communities and institutions, but the risk is that fragmented mandates and funding shortfalls blunt their impact.

6.3 Public Sector Stakeholders

Governments and international organizations form the backbone of legitimacy and enforcement. Their opportunities lie in codifying participatory practices into law, scaling governance innovations across entire populations, and embedding accountability in constitutional or international frameworks. Estonia's e-governance platform—ranging from e-ID to blockchain-based services—has become a global benchmark for citizen-centered digital governance, enabling secure participation in everything from voting to tax filing (UNDP 2023). Similarly, Barcelona's "Decidim" platform institutionalizes participatory democracy at the municipal level by allowing residents to propose, debate, and vote on local policies (IDEO 2015).

International organizations also play pivotal roles in coordination. The Open Government Partnership (OGP), now with over seventy member states, institutionalizes co-creation of governance reforms through national action plans that pair governments with civil society (Access Now 2022).

Risks include political capture, bureaucratic inertia, and uneven capacity. In fragile states, human-centered ideals risk becoming symbolic gestures. Conversely, strong and accountable governments can institutionalize participation and trust in enduring ways.

6.4 Hybrid and Multi-Sector Actors

Hybrid actors bring flexibility, innovation, and bridge-building capacity across state, market, and civil society divides. They can experiment quickly, channel philanthropic or venture capital funding into new models, and scale civic tech globally. The Partnership on AI, which unites academia, civil society, and private tech companies, has developed practical frameworks for algorithmic fairness and transparency, showing how multi-stakeholder collaboration can set emerging standards (Wampler 2022).

Philanthropic organizations also play a key role. The Omidyar Network has funded global civic tech initiatives, including research on responsible AI and democracy (OECD 2021). At the grassroots, civic tech start-ups like Ushahidi (developed in Kenya to crowdsource crisis data during election violence) and Polis (used in Taiwan to build deliberative democracy tools) demonstrate how small hybrid actors can scale inclusive governance practices worldwide (Edelman 2023).



The risks, however, stem from weak accountability structures and mission drift. Without clear oversight, philanthropic foundations and civic tech start-ups may pursue their own agendas, sometimes sidelining community voices or reinforcing inequities. Their hybrid nature makes them powerful innovators but raises questions of legitimacy and alignment with the public interest.

6.5 Power Dynamics and Accountability

Stakeholder interplay is not neutral. For-profits wield resources and platforms but lack legitimacy; non-profits and communities hold legitimacy but often lack scale; governments provide enforcement but are constrained by politics; international organizations enable coordination but depend on member states' will; and hybrids innovate but risk escaping accountability. Human-centered governance requires balancing mechanisms: transparency obligations for corporations, funding diversity for NGOs, citizen oversight councils for governments, and peer-review processes for international organizations. Without these, power asymmetries can derail governance.

6.6 The Pride Element: Shared Ownership

Human-centered governance succeeds when all stakeholders see themselves as co-owners of legitimacy. For-profits can take pride in mobilizing resources responsibly. Non-profits can take pride in amplifying marginalized voices. Governments can take pride in embedding participation into legal systems. International organizations can take pride in building frameworks for accountability. Communities can take pride in shaping policies that reflect their lived realities. This shared pride transforms governance from a competitive or hierarchical process into a collective endeavor anchored in co-responsibility and mutual recognition.

It also reinforces the architectural framework outlined in section 9: for-profit actors provide scale, non-profits provide legitimacy, governments ensure enforcement, and hybrid actors innovate. Success depends on balancing these contributions through transparent oversight and structured collaboration.





7.

Symbiotic Collaboration: Humans and AI in Governance

Human-centered governance in the digital age must confront the rise of AI and automation. While these tools offer immense promise, they must be integrated with caution. AI should function not as a substitute for human governance but as a complement to it—empowering human-centered governance with greater meaning, capacity, and reach.

Symbiotic collaboration refers to a structured partnership between humans and artificial intelligence in which each contributes distinct and complementary strengths. AI offers efficiency, pattern recognition, and even creative potential through its ability to process large datasets and detect trends that humans might miss. Humans contribute ethics, empathy, contextual reasoning, and social awareness—qualities machines cannot replicate.

For this collaboration to succeed, clear role definition is critical. It is not merely about assigning tasks but about recognizing the boundaries of technological capability and the irreplaceable value of human judgment. A symbiotic model deliberately designs systems where AI supports rather than substitutes human insight.

Crucially, enabling symbiotic intelligence requires going beyond algorithmic performance. Attention must also be given to data quality, governance, and the integrity of underlying processes. Poor data or opaque systems can erode trust and embed bias, regardless of how advanced the algorithm may be.

Embedding AI in governance must also reflect cultural values and institutional innovation. Ethics boards, citizen AI panels, and digital assemblies—piloted in Canada, Germany, and Singapore—demonstrate how inclusive structures can align technology with social norms. Such mechanisms ensure that symbiotic intelligence evolves through not only technical performance but also moral clarity, democratic accountability, and institutional adaptation.

By anchoring AI development in human-centered principles and well-defined roles, symbiotic collaboration offers a pathway to responsible, inclusive, and effective integration of intelligent technologies. Yet as governance frameworks mature, they must adapt to the broader transformations AI introduces into the systems and infrastructures of digital society.



AI reshapes governance not only in supporting decision-making but also in managing data infrastructure, algorithmic platforms, and emerging digital environments. Governance must address both current applications of AI and their anticipatory impacts—how data is collected, stored, shared, and repurposed for future AI uses. As the World Economic Forum (2023) emphasizes in its *AI Governance Framework*, governance must account for the “might be” as rigorously as the “is,” ensuring ethical foresight and system readiness.

Anticipatory governance therefore calls for future-proofing mechanisms within public institutions: for instance, regulatory sandboxes for AI experimentation, dynamic auditing tools, and forward-looking legislation. The European Commission’s *AI Act* proposes risk-tiered oversight that could serve as a model, enabling governments to test emerging tools while safeguarding public interest (European Commission 2023).

Consider, for instance, digitized but not yet AI-enabled public transportation planning systems. These may soon adopt predictive analytics and automated decision models. A human-centered governance approach would proactively integrate participatory data governance frameworks, ensuring that future AI use remains aligned with ethical standards, community needs, and institutional transparency (Floridi and Cowls 2019).

This collaboration requires organizational readiness, understood as both individual capabilities and institutional structures. On the capability side, this includes data literacy, ethical reflexivity, and participatory design. On the structural side, mechanisms such as AI oversight boards, digital ethics panels, and citizen assemblies—already tested in Canada, Germany, and Singapore—show promise for embedding accountability at scale (OECD 2021).

Ultimately, symbiotic intelligence—reflecting the shared agency between humans and AI—depends not only on functional integration but also on moral clarity and inclusive vision. It is not enough to deploy AI; we must govern the conditions under which it may evolve.

Advancing this vision requires moving beyond abstract principles toward actionable design. Operationalizing human-centered governance calls for deliberate, structured, and participatory systems that place human agency at the core. The following section introduces the Human-Centered Governance Framework, a model that translates ideals into measurable and adaptive practices. Through co-design, inclusive implementation, and participatory evaluation, this framework demonstrates how governance can be meaningfully anchored in people’s values, lived experiences, and cultural contexts



8.

The Human-Centered Governance Cycle: From Co-Design to Evaluation

The Human-Centered Governance Cycle is a dynamic, iterative model designed to embed equity, inclusion, and accountability throughout every stage of governance. It underscores that human-centered systems must be more than aspirational; they must be structured, measurable, and participatory across the full policy cycle.

This cycle provides an actionable pathway for aligning institutional goals with human needs. It begins with **co-design**, where representative, empowered, and informed stakeholders collaboratively shape governance priorities. Communities co-create agendas, ensuring that policies reflect lived realities, social norms, and value systems specific to each region, group, or culture. This level of customization empowers people not only as participants but as co-architects of change.

The second stage, **inclusive implementation**, ensures that the delivery of services and policies is not only efficient but equitable. This phase supports rapid feedback, continuous learning, and contextual responsiveness. Crucially, it provides opportunities to tailor governance to diverse identities, regional dynamics, and institutional capacity, acknowledging the different baselines from which communities operate.

The third stage, **participatory evaluation**, creates space for people to reflect on and influence what success looks like. It anchors legitimacy in the lived experience of citizens and reinforces accountability by establishing “humanizing metrics”: Do people feel seen, heard, and respected? This process validates the importance of structured feedback loops, third-party checks, and inclusive indicators that ensure systems evolve with the communities they serve.

Across all three stages, **Human-Centered Features**—representation, empowerment, cultural sensitivity, and inclusion—are embedded. These features make decision-making not only transparent but shared, enabling real power shifts from institutions to people.



Most importantly, the framework illustrates that governance should not merely speak for the people—it must work with and through them. Human-centeredness is not a passive principle; it is a proactive strategy for restoring civic trust and collective efficacy. It recognizes that communities and coalitions hold vital knowledge for shaping resilient systems. By fostering coalition-building and cross-sector collaboration, institutions can learn from lived experience, iterate policies in real time, and cultivate governance that is agile, inclusive, and locally meaningful.

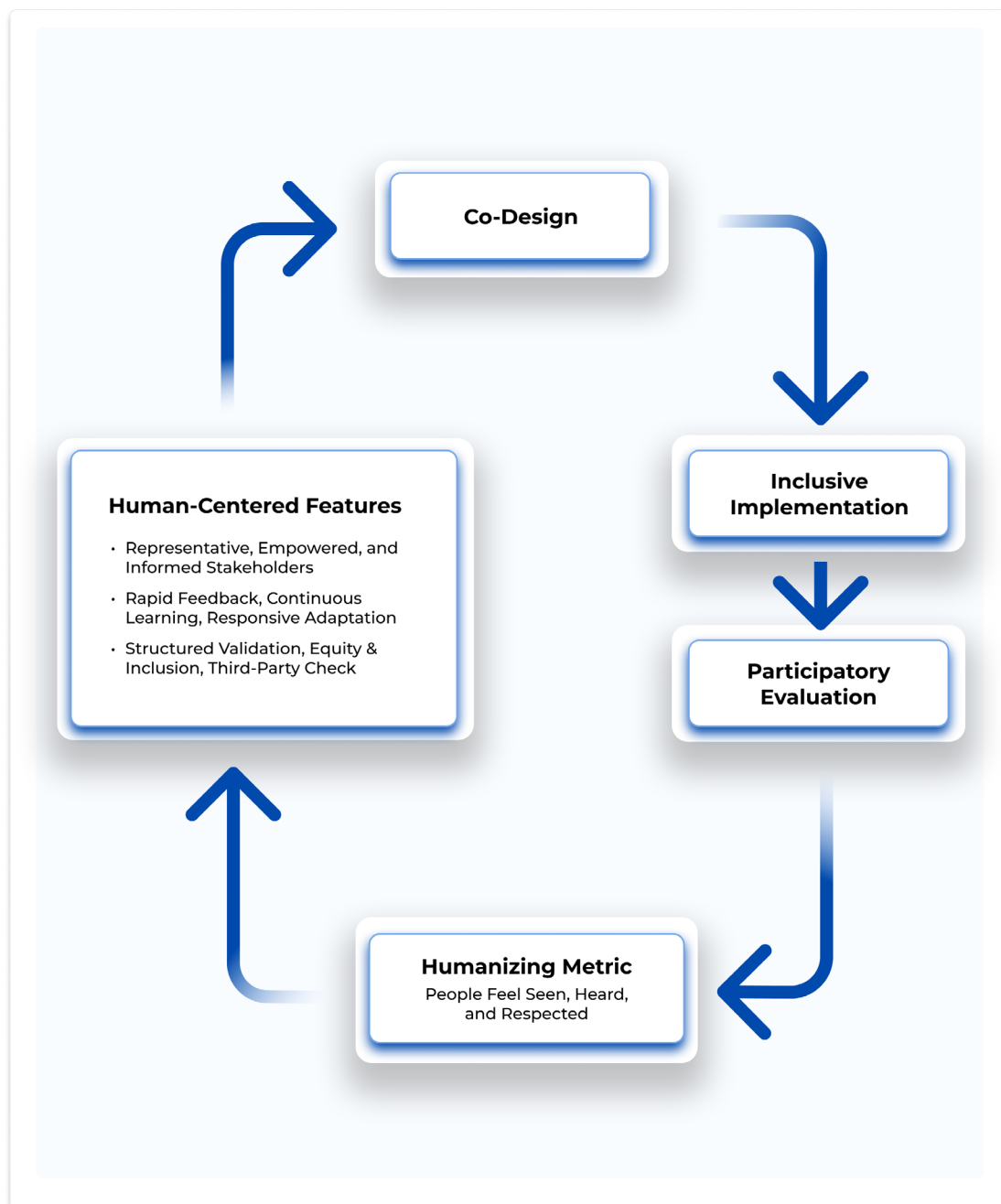


Figure 1. Human-centered governance cycle



9.

Conceptual Foundations of the Governance Framework

To move from conceptual design to practice, human-centered governance requires a layered architecture that not only defines values, processes, and technologies but also demonstrates how governance actually flows. Each layer in the system operates as part of a cycle, with inputs feeding into institutional processes and producing outputs that shape trust, legitimacy, and accountability.

At the foundation lies the **value layer**, where cultural norms, human rights principles, and ethical frameworks are codified through constitutional protections, policy guidelines, or organizational codes of conduct. This translation of ideals into enforceable principles represents the process by which values are institutionalized. The outputs of this layer are not abstract; they take the form of legitimacy benchmarks and a shared ethical foundation that anchors subsequent layers. For example, the European Union's *Digital Services Act* (2022) demonstrates how principles such as transparency and fairness can be embedded into legal obligations for online platforms, resulting in enforceable rights and user protections (e-Estonia 2023).

Building upon this is the **technology layer**, which positions digital systems, data infrastructures, and AI applications as enabling instruments rather than governing actors. Inputs here include technical innovations, platform infrastructures, and algorithmic tools. These are processed through institutional audits, ethical design protocols, and structured oversight mechanisms that ensure technology remains accountable to human needs. The outputs are expanded access to services, improved efficiency, and enhanced transparency—without surrendering final decision-making to machines. Estonia's e-ID and blockchain-backed registries illustrate this principle: technical inputs are processed through secure digital identity systems and oversight protocols to deliver accessible, trusted public services (OECD 2020).



The **participation layer** integrates citizen and stakeholder voices into governance workflows. Inputs such as community knowledge, civic proposals, and stakeholder data enter deliberative processes, including participatory budgeting, digital platforms, and municipal assemblies. These processes institutionalize participation not as one-off consultations but as continuous feedback loops. The resulting outputs are co-created policies and inclusive decision-making that enjoy greater legitimacy because they emerge from collective design. Barcelona's *Decidim* platform illustrates this dynamic: citizen proposals are the input, the deliberation platform structures the process, and municipal policies shaped by citizen voice are the output (Edelman 2023).

Above participation lies the **process and oversight layer**, where inputs include formal laws, protocols, and institutional mandates. These are processed through mechanisms such as independent audits, algorithmic impact assessments, and ombuds institutions that evaluate and constrain the exercise of power. The outputs are accountability, transparency, and safeguards against capture by either state or corporate interests. Canada's Algorithmic Impact Assessment exemplifies this dynamic: AI deployment plans serve as inputs, risk-tiered evaluations provide the process, and public transparency reports with safeguards are the outputs (OECD 2020).

At the top rests the **governance layer**, the synergistic outcome of values, technology, participation, and oversight operating together. Inputs into this layer are the cumulative products of the previous stages, processed through iterative cycles of policy design, implementation, and evaluation that center human dignity. The outputs are trust, legitimacy, inclusion, and sustainable governance systems capable of responding to disruption. The Open Government Partnership illustrates this principle in action, combining national action plans (inputs) with civil society review and peer assessment (process), resulting in more transparent and participatory governance commitments across more than seventy countries (UNDP 2023).

This architecture must also scale across levels of governance. At the municipal level, community oversight boards and participatory dashboards transform citizen knowledge into localized legitimacy and trust. At the national level, independent audit bodies and legal safeguards ensure constitutional rights are preserved amid technological change. At the global level, peer-review systems such as the OGP or OECD benchmarking enable cross-national comparability and accountability. Embedding the same architecture across these levels prevents capture, ensures consistency, and maintains a continuous flow from values to outcomes regardless of scale.



Finally, this layered system is animated by three dynamic currents—decision, community, and oversight—that flow vertically across every layer. Decision ensures authority remains distributed and transparent, community roots governance in lived realities, and oversight provides safeguards against institutional or technological drift. Together, these currents transform inputs such as citizen participation, institutional mandates, and technological tools into outputs of accountable, adaptive, and human-centered governance.



10.

Economic and Environmental Dimensions

Human-centered governance must reconcile social equity with both environmental and economic boundaries. The contexts in which humans coexist remain central to the long-term well-being of humankind. Human-centered governance, therefore, extends beyond individuals: it must account for economic structures—including market systems, resource distribution, labor practices—that either reinforce or undermine equity. For instance, the World Bank (2022) reports that income inequality, as measured by the Gini index, has widened in over half of OECD countries since 2010, underscoring the persistence of structural barriers to equity.

At the same time, the environmental dimension cannot be ignored. The International Energy Agency (2023) warns that AI training alone now consumes more than 200 TWh annually—roughly equivalent to the energy use of a medium-sized country. These figures illustrate why governance cannot be considered human-centered unless it simultaneously addresses equity and sustainability.

Crucially, human-centered governance must also recognize how social and environmental systems co-exist within cultural contexts. Embedding sustainability into governance design is not only about reducing emissions or conserving resources; it is about ensuring the long-term resilience of societies, economies, and ecosystems. In this sense, human-centered governance becomes planetary-centered governance, acknowledging that human flourishing is inseparable from ecological stability.



11.

Framework Architecture for Implementation: Technology, Process, and the Role of Human Checks

To move from conceptual design to practical application, human-centered governance must rest on a clear architectural foundation—one that aligns values, processes, and technologies through a coherent and adaptive structure. This architecture articulates how ethical intent is embedded within institutional workflows and how human agency is preserved, even as automation expands.

At the base of this model lies trust and human values, the ethical and cultural grounding upon which all governance functions must be constructed. These values are not merely philosophical; they are actionable principles that shape legitimacy, guide institutional behavior, and mediate community relationships with power.

Built upon this normative layer is technology, understood not as a governing actor but as an enabling instrument. When applied thoughtfully, technology can facilitate access, streamline communication, and enhance operational efficiency. However, its deployment must remain subordinate to human judgment and contextual understanding.

The next tier, participation and workflow, represents the integration of structured engagement into governance routines. This layer translates values into actionable formats by embedding stakeholder voice within decision cycles, enabling responsiveness, transparency, and agility. It is through this layer that governance becomes iterative and co-produced—responsive to the lived realities of the people it serves.

Positioned above are formalized processes, the rules, protocols, and institutional mechanisms that give structure to governance action. This includes legal statutes, policy tools, and operational frameworks. Critically, this layer also incorporates oversight, which safeguards against the misuse of delegated power and ensures alignment with the public good.



Crowning this structure is human-centric governance itself—not as a standalone aspiration but as the synergistic outcome of the preceding layers operating in concert. It reflects a system in which technological efficiency is harnessed without displacing ethical deliberation, and in which decision-making authority remains grounded in human experience.

Three dynamic currents—decision, community, and oversight—flow vertically across all layers of the architecture. These forces represent not only pathways of accountability and participation but also principles of design. They ensure that governance remains adaptive, inclusive, and anchored in collective responsibility. Importantly, this framework reframes the role of automation. Rather than replacing human actors, it emphasizes augmentation—leveraging technology to support, not supplant, human oversight and judgment. While digital tools may enhance efficiency and manage complexity, ethical checkpoints, accountability structures, and value alignment must remain under human stewardship.

Taken together, this architectural model offers a practical and principled approach to implementing human-centered governance. It affirms that effective governance is not built through technology alone but through the deliberate layering of values, participatory processes, and structured oversight. Only through this integrated design can we build systems that are not only efficient but also just, resilient, and truly centered on the people they serve.

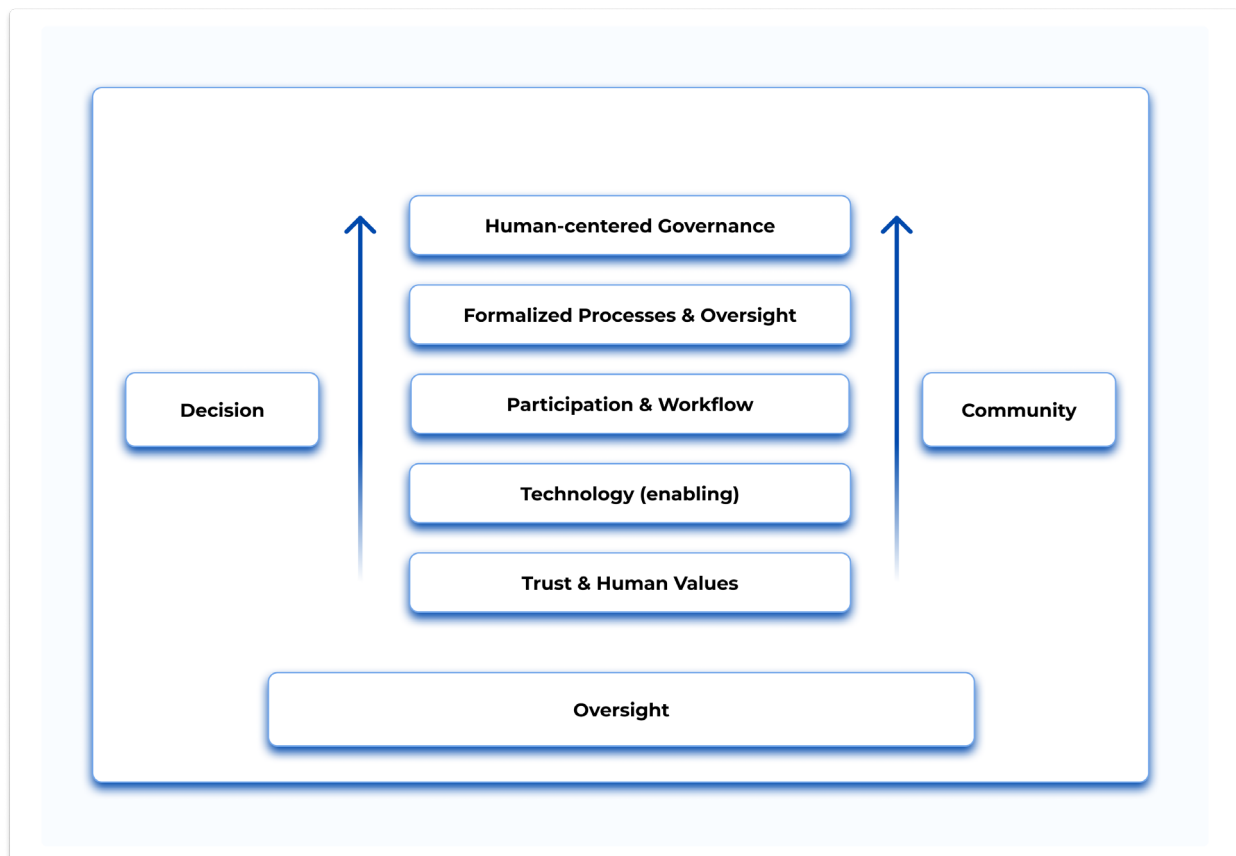


Figure 2. Framework for human-centered governance



Call to Action: Turning Principles into Practice

Human-centered governance cannot remain an abstract ideal; it must be operationalized through deliberate, measurable action across sectors. The following steps provide a roadmap:

- **For Governments and Public Institutions:** Establish permanent mechanisms of accountability, such as algorithmic audit registers, participatory budgeting platforms, and independent oversight councils. Governments should commit to publishing annual “human experience” metrics—tracking trust, dignity, and inclusion alongside efficiency—to ensure reforms are evaluated through lived outcomes, not just outputs. These metrics center human agency and meaning-making (e.g., self-reported trust levels, observed teamwork behaviors, qualitative reflections) rather than technologically mediated data alone.
- **For the Private Sector:** Corporations must embed transparency and equity into their value proposition. This means disclosing algorithmic audits, adopting fairness-by-design in product development, and aligning innovation with public interest. A benchmark could be annual reporting on digital trust indicators, with at least one measurable KPI tied to reducing bias or increasing accessibility. Embrace collective responsibility in building trusted, equitable digital systems, ensuring innovation aligns with the broader public good while creating business value and opportunities.
- **For Civil Society, Academia, and Non-Profits:** These actors should bridge local and global knowledge gaps. By developing open datasets, convening civic assemblies, and scaling inclusive literacy programs, civil society can act as both watchdog and knowledge broker. Partnerships with governments and firms should include safeguards to preserve independence while expanding reach, uniting efforts to bridge knowledge gaps and advance inclusive, participatory, transparent, and accountable systems at local and global scales.



- **For Citizens and Communities:** The legitimacy of governance ultimately depends on meaningful civic participation. Citizens have both the right and the responsibility to actively engage in governance processes through mechanisms such as open-data dashboards, civic assemblies, and deliberative platforms that translate individual voices into collective decision-making. Exercising these rights entails a commitment to informed participation, dialogue, and accountability. Likewise, communities can employ participatory evaluation tools to hold institutions accountable while ensuring that their dignity, agency, and perspectives remain central to governance processes. This dual emphasis on rights and responsibilities strengthens democratic legitimacy and fosters a more equitable and participatory governance ecosystem.

Taken together, these actions constitute the practical next step: transforming principles into systems, aspirations into accountability, and governance into a genuinely human-centered practice.





Conclusion: A Call For Deep Collaboration, from Concept to Collective Action

Human-centered governance is both a vision and a practice. It asks us to reimagine who holds power, how decisions are made, and what values guide our collective future. It blends structure with empathy, technology with trust, and oversight with openness.

To realize this vision, we require deliberate, coordinated, and courageous action. In an era of transformation—where technology, society, and environment are in constant flux—the principles here are imperatives for building systems that serve, empower, and uplift humanity while promoting inclusion and co-creating long-term, resilient systems. This human-centered governance will only take root when diverse stakeholders across sectors, geographies, and communities come together to co-design, co-create, and co-evaluate the very frameworks that shape our collective future.

We invite all change leaders, policymakers, practitioners, and engaged citizens to use this document as a shared language and blueprint for translating human-centered governance from concept to reality. Use these concepts to test, iterate, and scale the frameworks and practices needed to meet the challenges ahead.

As a collective, ongoing endeavor, we treat governance not as a control mechanism but as a shared process of meaning-making and accountability. Through deep collaboration across sectors, geographies, and technologies, we can build governance systems that are not only effective but truly human—restoring trust and forging a sustainable path for generations to come.



Authors:

Imen Ameur

Imen Ameur is a strategic and impact-driven leader at the intersection of AI governance, technology policy, and ethical innovation. With a background spanning economics, healthcare, higher education, and public-sector transformation, she bridges academia, research, industry, and policy to advance responsible and inclusive digital transformation. She serves as Senior Executive Fellow at The Digital Economist, Professor of Practice at Hult International Business School, and Vice President of Innovation & Head of the Scientific Committee at Cluster Digital Africa (CDA). Her cross-continental work connects ecosystems to drive collaboration, impact, and value creation through emerging technologies and innovation. Over the years, Imen has made a proven impact across renowned organizations—whether through founding and directing the Hult Founders Lab, teaching at Columbia University, contributing to research at the Harvard Kennedy School, working at renowned organizations such as Microsoft, AI Consulting, Neuledge and the European Investment Bank. A dedicated mentor to emerging entrepreneurs and innovators, she serves as a trusted advisor advancing ethical AI, digital equity, and sustainable progress toward the UN SDGs.

Jose Luis Carvalho

Jose Luis Carvalho is the Executive Director of The Digital Economist's Center of Excellence on the Human-Centered Global Economy, with more than 25 years of experience in services, consulting, and technology. He is dedicated to advancing responsible innovation and AI adoption, focusing on solutions that empower people, businesses, and society while strengthening organizational effectiveness. With a career spanning business development, organizational management, and activation of innovation, he brings a human-centered lens to disruptive technologies, advocating for ethical engagement and sustainable global transformation. Jose is also the co-founder and Managing Partner of the Value AI Institute, and advises businesses and startups on AI strategy and business scaling.



References

1. Access Now. 2022. *Defending Digital Rights Worldwide: Annual Report*.
2. Ansell, C., and Torfing, J. 2016. *Collaborative Governance: New Ideas for the Twenty-First Century*. Georgetown University Press.
3. Barcelona City Council. 2023. Decidim Barcelona.
4. Beaton, E., Guttman, A., and Munger, K. 2024. "The Yoke of Objectivity in Public Administration." *Journal of Public Affairs*.
5. Edelman. 2023. Edelman Trust Barometer. Edelman Data & Intelligence.
6. e-Estonia. 2023. The Digital Society. Government of Estonia.
7. Eubanks, V. 2018. *Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor*. St. Martin's Press.
8. European Union. 2022. Digital Services Act. Brussels.
9. European Commission. 2023. Proposal for an AI Act. Brussels.
10. European Commission. 2019. Antitrust: Commission sends Statement of Objections to Google. Brussels.
11. Floridi, L., and Cowls, J. 2019. "A Unified Framework of Five Principles for AI in Society." *Harvard Data Science Review*.
12. Government of Canada. 2023. Algorithmic Impact Assessment Tool. Treasury Board Secretariat.
13. IDEO. 2015. *The Field Guide to Human-Centered Design*. IDEO.org.
14. International Energy Agency (IEA). 2023. Electricity 2023: Analysis and Forecast to 2025.
15. Lin, T. 2021. "Civic Tech and Participatory Budgeting in Taiwan." *Asian Journal of Public Administration*.
16. Mazzucato, M. 2018. *The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy*. PublicAffairs.
17. Microsoft. 2023. AI for Health: Program Overview. Microsoft Philanthropies.
18. New York City Civic Engagement Commission. 2023. Annual Report.
19. Noveck, B. S. 2015. *Smart Citizens, Smarter State: The Technologies of Expertise and the Future of Governing*. Harvard University Press.
20. OECD. 2020. *Going Digital in Estonia*. Paris: OECD Publishing.



21. OECD. 2021. *AI Principles and Accountability Mechanisms*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
22. OECD. 2020. *Government at a Glance 2020*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
23. OECD. 2021. *Government at a Glance*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
24. OECD. 2022. *Reinforcing Democracy Report*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
25. Omidyar Network. 2023. Responsible Technology and Governance Programs.
26. Open Government Partnership (OGP). 2023. About OGP.
27. Partnership on AI. 2023. Fairness, Transparency, and Accountability Frameworks.
28. Polis. 2023. Case Studies in Deliberative Democracy.
29. Poole Civic Network. 2022. Community Deliberation Tools.
30. Smith, A. 2022. "Digital Equity and Decolonial Infrastructure in Guam." *Global South Review*.
31. Taiwan Gov. 2021. Participatory Budgeting Taiwan. Ministry of the Interior.
32. Transparency International. 2023. Corruption Perceptions Index.
33. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2023. Governance Indicators Report. UNDP.
34. UNDP. 2023. *Governance Indicators Report*.
35. Ushahidi. 2023. About Us.
36. Wampler, B. 2022. Participatory Budgeting: Innovations and Challenges. World Bank Group.
37. Section IV: Technology, Trust, and Context
38. World Bank. 2022. World Development Indicators. Gini Index.



About

The Digital Economist, headquartered in Washington, D.C. with offices at One World Trade Center in New York City, is the world's foremost think tank on innovation advancing a human-centered global economy through technology, policy, and systems change. We are an ecosystem of 40,000+ executives and senior leaders dedicated to creating the future we want to see—where digital technologies serve humanity and life.

We work closely with governments and multi-stakeholder organizations to change the game: how we create and measure value. With a clear focus on high-impact projects, we serve as partners of key global players in co-building the future through scientific research, strategic advisory, and venture build out.

We engage a global network to drive transformation across climate, finance, governance, and global development. Our practice areas include applied AI, sustainability, blockchain and digital assets, policy, governance, and healthcare. Publishing 75+ in-depth research papers annually, we operate at the intersection of emerging technologies, policy, and economic systems—supported by an up-and-coming venture studio focused on applying scientific research to today's most pressing socio-economic challenges.

CONTACT: [INFO@THEDIGITALECONOMIST.COM](mailto:info@thedigitaleconomist.com)