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Artificial Intelligence Governance in the Business Environment in the Middle East and North Africa: Between Digital Sovereignty and Geopolitical Competition

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Abstract:

The presentation examines the rise of artificial intelligence as a decisive factor in reshaping global power balances, where control over data, algorithms, and digital infrastructure has become central to economic and security influence. It compares the American, European, and Chinese governance models, showing how these approaches are exported through major technology companies and digital agreements.

The focus then shifts to the Middle East and North Africa, where countries seek to leverage AI for economic diversification but face growing risks of technological dependency, particularly in cloud computing and data. The study concludes that achieving digital sovereignty requires balanced partnerships, stronger local capacities, and regulatory frameworks that protect data without hindering innovation.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Technology Governance, Digital Sovereignty, Technological Dependency, Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

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1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary international system is undergoing a profound structural transformation, driven primarily by the digital revolution, and at its very core lies artificial intelligence, AI is no longer merely a technical tool; it has become a strategic resource that is actively reshaping our understanding of power, sovereignty, and influence in international relations.

Today artificial intelligence impacts the global economy, military doctrines, patterns of diplomacy, and even the capacity to project cultural and media influence. This makes it one of the most decisive factors determining a country's international standing.

In this new reality, competition among states no longer revolves solely around natural resources or conventional military superiority, The race has shifted toward control over data, algorithms, digital infrastructure, and the ability to set the rules governing technology use. This shift has given rise to new forms of conflict and cooperation, introduced modern concepts such as digital sovereignty, regulatory power, and mutual technological interdependence, and simultaneously created serious risks of digital dependency and strategic subordination.

This presentation starts from one central question:

To what extent has artificial intelligence become an instrument for reshaping the global balance of power, and how is this reflected in the strategic choices of states-particularly in the Middle East and North Africa region-between deepening digital dependence on one hand, and pursuing genuine technological sovereignty on the other?

Several sub-questions flow from this core issue:

- How is artificial intelligence influencing the broader geopolitical transformation and the redistribution of power among international actors ?

- What are the main features of the competition between different global models of AI governance-especially the American, European, and Chinese approaches ?
- How are business environments and economic decision-making in MENA countries being affected by these technological and regulatory shifts ?
- Do countries in the region possess the necessary ingredients to build a more autonomous model, or are they heading toward even deeper digital dependency?

The analysis adopts an international relations framework that combines geopolitical, economic, and regulatory perspectives, It draws on concepts from international political economy and technology governance, while also examining public policies, national models, and comparative international regulatory frameworks. The goal is to understand how AI has become an instrument of hard power and soft power.

The presentation is structured around four main axes:

1. The first axis examines artificial intelligence as a major factor influencing the global balance of power—focusing on the US–China rivalry, the European Union's role as a regulatory power, and the rising importance of the concept of digital sovereignty.
2. The second axis analyzes the major international models of AI governance and how they are being exported externally through big tech companies, digital trade agreements, and control over infrastructure.
3. The third axis focuses on AI governance within the MENA business environment-examining national policies, the role of multinational corporations, the challenges of data and cloud dependency, and the implications for corporate decision-making and competitiveness.
4. The fourth axis offers a critical reading of the tension between digital dependency and technological sovereignty, It explores opportunities for more balanced partnerships and presents concrete policy recommendations for governments, companies, and regulatory bodies.

Ultimately, this intervention seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the ongoing transformation in the structure of international power in the digital age and to highlight the Arab region's place within this rapidly changing global landscape.

Artificial intelligence as a powerful tool in international relations

In our current era, artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer just a technological advancement-it has become a decisive tool in shaping global power dynamics, AI is fundamentally redefining the ways countries generate economic, military, and diplomatic strength, making it a central arena for geopolitical rivalry.

As nations increasingly rely on AI for strategic forecasting, industrial innovation, and more, the race to achieve superiority in this field has become a matter of survival and global influence.

This shift feels reminiscent of previous industrial revolutions, where new technologies dramatically altered the balance of power. What makes AI unique, however, is its extraordinary speed and its pervasive impact across virtually every aspect of social and political life. (Mazarr,2026,p)

Artificial intelligence is actively reshaping the global distribution of power by significantly strengthening the capabilities of technologically advanced countries. This process is widening the already existing gaps between rich and developing nations, On one hand AI can dramatically boost economic innovation - for example by dramatically improving productivity through smart machines and automation, On the other hand, it also poses a serious threat of large-scale job displacement, especially in developing economies that still rely heavily on manual labor and low-cost labor.

This transformation shares striking similarities with the Industrial Revolution: technological progress created new dominant powers while disrupting old economic

structures. But today, the stakes are different - governments cannot simply wait for market forces to sort things out, Active public strategies are needed: serious investment in education continuous reskilling programs and forward-looking training systems have become essential to help societies adapt and avoid being left permanently behind. (Alpaydin , 2020 p)

At the same time artificial intelligence raises serious security concerns, It can be used to power sophisticated cyber attacks or to develop autonomous weapons, fundamentally changing the nature of warfare.

Countries that gain the upper hand in AI technology will be able to anticipate their adversaries' moves with unprecedented accuracy - giving them a major strategic edge, This dynamic is fueling what many describe as a digital arms race, where control over AI becomes essential to protecting national sovereignty in a deeply interconnected world(Horowitz, 2021, p)

Artificial Intelligence and the Shift in the Global Balance of Power

Artificial intelligence has become one of the main drivers reshaping the global balance of power. It is fundamentally changing the nature of both military and economic capabilities of nations. In the past, a country's strength was largely determined by its natural resources and the size of its human workforce, Today however artificial intelligence has emerged as a decisive factor in boosting productivity and driving innovation.

For example AI can dramatically improve the efficiency of resource exploration- whether in oil, gas, or critical minerals - and it enables the development of highly advanced defense systems, These capabilities give technologically leading countries a clear and growing advantage over others (Horowitz, 2021, p)

This transformation is also leading to a major realignment of international alliances. Countries are now actively seeking technological partnerships to counter shared threats and stay competitive, For instance, the United States is increasingly building coalitions with European countries specifically to respond to China's massive investments and rapid

advances in artificial intelligence.

This development shows how technology has itself become a powerful instrument of diplomacy, Access to data control over algorithms and leadership in AI capabilities have turned into major sources of national strength and influence on the global stage. (Lee, 2018)

However, this transformation also carries real risks of instability, An intense technological race can easily spark new forms of conflict between states, Developing countries risk finding them selves in an increasingly vulnerable position - unless they make serious investments in building their own digital capabilities. Narrowing this growing divide will require genuine international cooperation; without it, the gap between the technological "haves" and "have-nots" will only continue to widen.

Artificial intelligence is also having a major impact on soft power, It can be used to spread culture, values or even propaganda through digital platforms at an unprecedented scale and speed, This gives countries powerful new ways to shape global public opinion and influence perceptions far beyond their borders. In this sense, controlling information flows and mastering algorithmic amplification have themselves become important elements in the modern balance of power. (Nye, 2021,p 152)

In the end navigating this transformation successfully will require long-term, forward-thinking strategies from countries that want to maintain their position and relevance. This includes sustained investment in research and development, as well as a deep commitment to improving education systems at all levels.

The US–China Competition in Technology

The competition between the United States and China in technology-especially artificial intelligence -is one of the most prominent geopolitical struggles of the 21st century. China is striving to achieve technological self-sufficiency through plans such as "Made in China 2025" while the United States seeks to maintain its dominance by imposing export

controls. (Kennedy, , 2025, p57)

This rivalry extends to semiconductors, where the U.S. has imposed sanctions on Chinese companies such as Huawei, forcing China to develop domestic alternatives this reflects how technology has become a tool of political pressure.

Nevertheless China has made significant progress in artificial intelligence, with models such as Deep Seek now competing with American models, raising concerns in the U.S. about the potential loss of its technological lead.

This competition is affecting the global economy by fragmenting supply chains and increasing costs for multinational companies.

Ultimately, this rivalry could result in a bipolar world, where the United States and China compete to pull other countries into their respective technological camps.

The European Union's Role as a Regulatory Power

The European Union stands out as a regulatory model in the field of artificial intelligence through the AI Act, which balances the protection of fundamental rights with innovatio this legislation classifies AI systems by risk level prohibiting high-risk applications such as facial recognition in public spaces. (European Commission. 2024)

This approach reflects the European Union's regulatory power, as it influences global companies that wish to access the European market, effectively turning European rules into a de facto global standard.

Nevertheless, the EU faces challenges in balancing regulation with innovation, since overly strict rules may hinder the growth of startups and smaller companies.

The EU's role as a regulatory model underscores the importance of international cooperation to ensure the ethical use of artificial intelligence.

In the end, this role helps strengthen global trust in technology, thereby granting Europe significant geopolitical influence.

The Concept of Digital Sovereignty

The concept of digital sovereignty refers to a state's ability to exercise control over its own data and digital infrastructure in the face of dominance by global corporations. This notion has evolved significantly with the widespread adoption of artificial intelligence, as data has become a source of power . (Pohle, 2020)

In the international context, countries such as China pursue digital sovereignty through the construction of electronic firewalls, while Europe adopts an approach centered on privacy protection, This concept raises important challenges, as it may lead to the fragmentation of the internet, thereby threatening global connectivity, Nevertheless, digital sovereignty can serve as a tool for preserving cultural identity in an increasingly interconnected world.

Ultimately the concept requires a careful balance between national control and international cooperation to ensure the sustainability of the internet .

Second Axis: International Models of Artificial Intelligence Governance and Their External Impact In our current era, where artificial intelligence (AI) constitutes a central pillar of economic, social, and security transformations, the governance of this technology has become a core international issue, The second axis of this analysis - which focuses on international models of AI governance and their external impact - reflects how major powers such as the United States, the European Union, and China are competing to shape the global rules of the game.

These models are not merely domestic policies; they serve as instruments for exporting values and standards, thereby influencing other countries through technology companies, digital agreements, and investments in digital infrastructure, with the growing reliance on artificial intelligence across sectors such as the digital economy and cyber security, the external impact of these governance models has emerged as a decisive factor in

the international balance of power. Depending on the approach, they can either promote innovation, impose control or protect fundamental rights. (Pohle, Julia. 2020)

The American Model: Market-Driven and Innovation-Centric

The American model of artificial intelligence governance emphasizes the free market and innovation, It relies on a decentralized approach that encourages private companies to lead technological development with minimal government intervention, In 2025 the Trump administration launched the "America First in Artificial Intelligence" plan which prioritizes deregulation to accelerate innovation and focuses on exporting the "full American technology stack" to allied countries, this approach reflects an economic philosophy that views artificial intelligence as a key driver of economic growth Private investment in AI reached $109.1 billion in 2024, compared to $9.3 billion in China.

However this model raises concerns about insufficient oversight, which may lead to ethical risks such as biases embedded in intelligent models, At the same time it provides the United States with a significant global competitive advantage through dominant companies such as Google and Amazon, which continue to lead the worldwide market. (The White House,2025)

In the context of American innovation, private investment plays a prominent role in building artificial intelligence infrastructure, the United States has become the center of model development, producing 40 notable models in 2024, This approach relies on partnerships between the private and public sectors, as seen in the "Genesis Mission" program, which resembles the Manhattan Project but focuses on commercial innovation. However, this model faces challenges, including the lack of comprehensive national regulations, the United States relies on fragmented state-level laws which may hinder international coordination. On the external front, this helps export American models globally, but it also widens the digital divide with developing countries. (Stanford HAI, 2025).

The European Model: Regulation and Data Protection

In contrast, the European model relies on comprehensive regulation and data protection, as demonstrated by the AI Act, which entered into force in 2024 and classifies applications by risk level, This approach aims to ensure that artificial intelligence is safe and transparent, with a strong emphasis on protecting fundamental rights, It represents a natural extension of the General Data Protection Regulation –GDPR-.

In 2025 the European Commission announced the "Smart Continent" plan, which involves investing 200 billion euros to develop AI factories while ensuring compliance with ethical standards this reflects the European Union's core values of balancing innovation with protection. However, it may slow down competitiveness compared to the United States.

The European model's impact on data protection is particularly evident through its integration with GDPR, the regulatory framework requires risk assessments for high-risk systems - such as those used in education or employment. While this strengthens global trust, it also imposes high costs on companies including potential fines of up to 35 million euros. On the international level, the European model exerts influence through the so-called "Brussels Effect", in which other countries adopt similar standards to access the European market this contributes to strengthening global AI governance. (Artificial Intelligence Act , 2024)

The Chinese Model: The State and Control

The Chinese model relies heavily on a strong state role and tight regulatory oversight. It integrates artificial intelligence into national policies to enhance social stability and national security, In 2025 China launched the "Global AI Governance Initiative" which emphasizes international coordination under United Nations leadership, with particular focus on content moderation and data control, This approach reflects the logic of a "regulatory state" in which technology is employed for large-scale surveillance-most notably exemplified by the social credit system, Nevertheless, this framework has enabled remarkably rapid progress: in 2024 alone, China produced 15 prominent AI models despite continuing U.S. restrictions on advanced chips.(Zeng , 2025)

A defining feature of the Chinese model is the deep integration between the state and major technology companies - such as Huawei and Alibaba - whose AI development is guided and supervised by the Communist Party, While this structure strengthens control, it has also raised serious international concerns regarding privacy and civil liberties, Externally, China exports its model through the "Digital Silk Road" (part of the broader Belt and Road Initiative), thereby influencing many developing countries.

Export of Regulatory Models through Major Technology Companies , Major technology firms play a decisive role in spreading national regulatory philosophies. Companies such as Google and Microsoft actively promote the American market-driven innovation model worldwide, By 2025 the cumulative export of the "U.S, technology stack" had significantly increased global reliance on American AI models, backed by cumulative investments reaching approximately $470 billion, while this strengthens external influence, it also widens digital divides. In the European context, companies such as Siemens help export the regulatory model by complying with - and effectively internationalizing - the EU AI Act, thereby influencing global partners, Meanwhile China uses firms like Huawei to promote its control-oriented model through the "Digital Silk Road" This competition over

regulatory-export models has become an important dimension of geopolitical rivalry.(Taylor, 2026)

Third Axis : Governance of Artificial Intelligence in the Business Environment in MENA

In the context of international relations, the governance of artificial intelligence in the business environment of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region poses a strategic challenge that balances technological innovation with geopolitical balance, As a university professor specializing in this field, I view this governance not merely as a regulatory framework but as a tool for strengthening digital sovereignty and reducing external dependencies, especially amid global competition between major powers such as the United States and China, In the region countries such as the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Qatar have witnessed rapid progress in adopting artificial intelligence, driven by national visions aimed at economic diversification away from oil. This approach reflects how AI can transform business dynamics by improving efficiency and creating new opportunities, while also raising concerns about privacy and cyber security.

In this article we will review national policies in selected models, the role of multinational companies, data dependency and cloud infrastructure, and their impact on corporate decisions data protection, and competitiveness drawing on recent reliable sources.(UAE AI Office, 2023)

National Artificial Intelligence Policies in Some MENA Countries -Selected Models-

Governance of artificial intelligence in MENA begins with the establishment of strong national policies, with the United Arab Emirates standing out as a leading model , In its National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence until 2031, the UAE focuses on integrating AI across key sectors such as healthcare, education, and transportation, aiming to become one of the world's most prominent countries in this field, This strategy launched in 2017 and recently updated, includes initiatives such as the establishment of Mohamed bin Zayed

University of Artificial Intelligence and a research laboratory in Silicon Valley, which enhance local innovation and reduce reliance on foreign technologies.

In the business environment, this policy helps companies make more efficient decisions through AI tools, while requiring adherence to ethical standards to ensure transparency, It also strengthens international partnerships, particularly with the United States, to access advanced chips, reflecting the geopolitical dimension of AI governance, This approach contributes to economic diversification, with AI expected to add 335 billion AED to the gross domestic product by 2031, thereby enhancing regional competitiveness. (UAE AI Office, 2023)

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the National Strategy for Data and Artificial Intelligence, approved in 2020, forms a fundamental part of Vision 2030, It aims to position the Kingdom as a global hub for artificial intelligence, with objectives such as training more than 20,000 specialists and attracting 75 billion Saudi Riyals in investments, The strategy is built on five pillars: skills, policies and regulations, investment, research and innovation, and the ecosystem. In the business context, it has spurred the creation of more than 300 AI startups, enhancing innovation and reducing dependence on imported technology, It also emphasizes ethical use, with guidelines for the use of generative artificial intelligence to protect commercial data, this framework influences corporate decisions by providing local cloud infrastructure, thereby reducing reliance on foreign companies and enhancing competitiveness in sectors such as energy and healthcare, Nevertheless the challenge remains in balancing innovation with digital sovereignty, particularly in light of massive investments such as the "Project Transcendence" valued at 100 billion dollars in 2024(Saudi Data and AI Authority –SDAIA-)

As for Qatar, the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy, launched in 2019 and subsequently updated, is based on six pillars: the race for talent, access to data, transformation of the employment landscape, new business opportunities, Qatar as an "AI + X" country, and ethics and public policy. This strategy aims to integrate artificial intelligence into all aspects of life and business, with a focus on local applications such as Arabic language processing and precision medicine, In the business environment, it supports the transformation of the diversified economy-such as the gas and aviation sectors-by incentivizing the adoption of artificial intelligence rather than relying on low-cost labor, It also addresses privacy issues through guidelines inspired by the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), thereby enhancing companies' confidence in using data, This approach strengthens regional competitiveness, particularly through investments of 2.5 billion dollars in data and artificial intelligence under the Digital Agenda 2030, and reduces the risks of cloud dependency by developing local infrastructure.(Qatar Center for Artificial Intelligence , 2022)

Regarding Egypt, its 2019 National Artificial Intelligence Strategy is part of its digital transformation efforts, It focuses on human-centered artificial intelligence and responsible deployment. It includes governance mechanisms for skills, technology, and the ecosystem, along with multi-stakeholder dialogue to address ethical concerns such as bias and gender equality, In the business environment, it is expected to contribute to a 7.5% increase in GDP by 2030, particularly in agriculture, healthcare, and manufacturing, while raising labor-market challenges due to automation, the strategy promotes regional cooperation in Africa and the Arab world, thereby enhancing competitiveness and places special emphasis on Arabic-language processing infrastructure to reduce reliance on foreign models. (Arab Reform Initiative, 2023)

The Role of Multinational Companies in Shaping the Digital Business Environment

Multinational companies play a decisive role in shaping the digital business environment in MENA by making massive investments and entering into strategic partnerships. For example, Microsoft collaborated with MGX in the United Arab Emirates to build artificial intelligence infrastructure, while Qualcomm announced a partnership with Humain in Saudi Arabia to develop advanced data centers, these partnerships facilitate technology transfer and local talent development, yet they increase the region's dependence on American technologies, raising questions of digital sovereignty, In the context of international relations, these dynamics reflect geopolitical competition, as Gulf countries seek to attract investment to strengthen economic diversification.(Crowell & Moring LLP,2025)

Data Dependency and Cloud Infrastructure

Data dependency in MENA is closely linked to cloud infrastructure, as the region relies heavily on service providers such as Amazon, Google, and Microsoft, which have established multiple cloud regions, the cloud computing market is projected to reach $179.51 billion by 2032. However, data localization laws-such as those in Oman and the United Arab Emirates-restrict free data flows, resulting in less efficient artificial intelligence systems and biased datasets. This dependency increases companies' operational costs and limits innovation, highlighting the need to balance national sovereignty with global data flows.

In the context of privacy laws such as Saudi Arabia's Personal Data Protection Law provide basic rights, yet they do not fully address artificial intelligence-specific challenges such as automated profiling, this affects data dependency as strong encryption is required for protection, but restrictions on encryption in Egypt reduce trust and increase vulnerability to cyber attacks , Multinational companies rely on encryption to invest, making balanced

regulation critical for competitiveness.(Internet Society , 2026)

Data dependency and cloud infrastructure significantly influence corporate decisions in MENA, Reliance on foreign companies drives strategies to mitigate risks, such as building local data centers, In Saudi Arabia, the artificial intelligence project aims to encourage local investments of 45 billion riyals by 2030, enabling companies to make more independent decisions. Nevertheless, this dependency heightens the risk of breaches, requiring decisions on compliance with international standards to maintain global competitiveness.

In Saudi Arabia the regulatory framework encourages companies to invest in local training thereby enhancing competitiveness by reducing reliance on foreign expertise and strengthening data protection through ethical guidelines. (Saudi Data and AI Authority , 2025)

Fourth Axis: Between Digital Dependency and Technological Sovereignty-A Critical Readin , In the context of contemporary international relations, the fourth axis, which addresses the balance between digital dependency and technological sovereignty, emerges as a crucial issue for the Arab region, where Arab countries are subjected to increasing geopolitical pressures due to global competition over digital technologies ,This axis requires a deep critical reading to understand how to enhance technological independence amid reliance on foreign technologies, focusing on available capabilities, long-term risks, opportunities for balanced partnerships, and policy recommendations.

As a university professor specializing in international relations, I see that the Arab region faces structural challenges stemming from disparities in technological investment, yet it has the potential to transform towards greater sovereignty if strategic opportunities are exploited thoughtfully, We will start by evaluating whether the region is capable of building an independent model, then move to the risks of technological mortgaging, to partnership opportunities, and finally to policy recommendations.(Celso , 2024 , p 60)

Long-term Risks of Technological Mortgaging

Moving to the long-term risks of technological mortgaging, reliance on foreign technologies deepens regional disparities in the Middle East and North Africa, An unbalanced investment in artificial intelligence leads to geopolitical dominance by Gulf Cooperation Council countries, For example AI-driven digital economy growth could displace nearly half of labor activities in countries such as Egypt (48.7%) and the United Arab Emirates (47%), increasing unemployment and reducing financial remittances, this mortgaging traps low-income countries in low-value activities such as data cleaning, hindering long-term economic transformation, and reinforcing dependence on Gulf imports, thereby threatening political and foreign sovereignty.(Alterman, 2026)

In the context of U.S.-China competition, reliance on China's Digital Silk Road leads to the risk of technological lock-in It limits compatibility with Western systems and exposes countries to unauthorized access, as reflected in U.S. concerns about espionage through Huawei networks. In the long term, this dependency results in the fragmentation of digital landscapes and the loss of strategic sovereignty-particularly due to U.S. export restrictions that force countries to choose between the two systems. (Marks , 2026)

Opportunities for Building Balanced Partnerships

The Arab region offers a laboratory for digital experimentation, where partnerships with the European Union can strengthen sovereignty through the exchange of technological standards-as demonstrated by the models of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, which rank ahead of some European countries in telecommunications rankings, Such partnerships can include developing shared infrastructure and cyber security training, thereby reducing dependence on any single system. (Celso , 2024 , p 56)

Balanced partnerships can also be achieved through diversification with South Korea, India, and Japan, which helps decrease reliance on eithe the United States or China, Hybrid models combining Chinese 5G networks with Western systems have already been

implemented in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. This approach enhances sovereignty by localizing semiconductor and artificial intelligence supply chains, positioning Gulf countries as essential global partners. (Marks , 2026)

Technological diplomacy in the region creates opportunities for partnerships by reshaping U.S.-Gulf relations through innovation and investment, Conferences such as those organized by TRENDS, which focus on the role of artificial intelligence in soft power and digital infrastructure, promote balanced cooperation without dependency.

Regarding policy recommendations for governments, national digital transition strategies should be adopted-following the models of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia-with an emphasis on building infrastructure and workforce training to reduce dependency. Regional coordination through the Arab League is also essential to counter cyber threats and strengthen sovereignty. (Bilbao-Osorio , 2023)

For companies, it is recommended to support local innovation through partnerships with governments to develop indigenous technologies, while adhering to international standards to mitigate risks-as seen in support for fin tech startups.

Regulatory bodies should establish data privacy frameworks inspired by GDPR with a focus on balanced partnerships to avoid dependency in line with ECDPM recommendations for developing countries. (Jones , 2023)

Conclusion

This study reveals that artificial intelligence is no longer merely a technical field, it has clearly become a central arena for reshaping the hierarchy of power in the international system, States that possess the ability to develop advanced algorithms, control data flows, and build sovereign digital infrastructures now wield tools of economic, military and regulatory influence that far surpass those of traditional power.

The analysis of international models of artificial intelligence governance

demonstrates that the world is moving toward regulatory pluralism, reflecting differences in values and political systems, an American model based on the market and innovation, a European model centered on regulation and the protection of rights, and a Chinese model led by the state and dominated by considerations of control and stability, This divergence does not remain confined to domestic policies, it is exported externally through giant corporations, digital agreements, and infrastructure financing, making AI governance a tool of geopolitical influence.

In the Middle East and North Africa region, rapid digital transformation offers significant opportunities to enhance economic diversification and raise competitiveness, at the same time, however, it deepens the risks of digital dependency-particularly with respect to cloud infrastructure, semiconductors, and global platforms. While some Gulf countries are leading efforts to build national capabilities in artificial intelligence, regional gaps persist, limiting the possibility of developing a comprehensive, independent Arab model.

The critical reading confirms that the future of the region will not be determined solely by the extent of its adoption of technology, but by how it governs it and by its ability to transition from being a mere consumer of technologies to a participant in their production and regulation, Technological sovereignty does not mean isolation it means building balanced partnerships, diversifying technology sources and strengthening local research and development capacities, alongside regulatory frameworks that protect data and rights without stifling innovation.

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