



Feature *The Curious Case of Artificial Intelligence and its Attendant 'Digital Society'*

The early 2010s saw a significant shift in computer science research with the spread of Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) as affordable hardware and the subsequent explosion of machine learning (ML). This resulted in deep learning models making significant progress over the next decade. Within this timeline, there emerged an intensification of the political economy, characterised by the concentration of finance capital, the mystification of social and economic relations through algorithms, the enclosure of the digital commons, and, correspondingly, a new Artificial Intelligence (AI) industry, which is extremely hungry for data and funding.

The claims of this industry change every few months, policymakers can rarely catch on to developments and devise regulations by the time consensus reality has already been altered by algorithmic enforcement of norms no one voted for. Often, these changes are baked into the laws of existing economic forces and replicate patterns hidden in human social interactions. What policymakers around the world seem to agree on is that the hunger of this industry needs to be fed and its societal modifications tolerated or even encouraged, for it is a strategic investment, and one must not be the unfortunate nation that did not get on the AI bus. Aside from this desire for future hegemony or just plain developmentalism by states, there is the sober reality that many nation-states suffer from weak state capacity and thus see in this new industry the potential tools to provide bandages for their lack of institutions and services. Similarly, the cost-saving promise of AI is one of the factors that incentivise digital companies, especially social media companies, to relegate tasks to ML algorithms that are too expensive, distasteful, or both for these companies to hire humans to do. The spread of these technologies and their fundamental stochastic nature in the public sphere has significant policy consequences.

We find ourselves in this moment where the policy space needs to account for these developments that have been growing while this space is vacated by policymakers. For one, there is a dearth of scholarship on how the framing of this emerging industry and the discourses that surround it constrain and build economic and policy consensus. There is also a gap in our understanding and measurement of the concrete changes in the salaried wage relationship and the future of work resulting from these developments.

The intensive promotion and use of AI technologies is also altering societal consensus and material structures in the way citizens interact with the state, for example, through mechanisms of justice, or interact with each other in digital public squares. The following sections describe projects underway in ADCPS that investigate aspects of these policy questions.

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Call for Contributions

The Polilogue Quarterly is the newsletter of IIT Bombay's Ashank Desai Centre for Policy Studies. The next issue is slated for June 2026. Contributions may be sent to head.cps@iitb.ac.in by 23 June 2026.

How has Automation Altered White Collar Work?

Abhishek Sharad Mali



This research investigates how AI is being integrated into white-collar workflows in India and how policy discourse, innovation strategy, and institutional design co-shape these transformations. At its core, the study examines the governance-innovation dilemma arising from a technologically deterministic policy framing of AI, in which skill transformation is treated as an inevitable product of progress rather than a contingent outcome of political and economic choices.

By analysing AI policy texts and mapping the Indian AI ecosystem within a Global Innovation Systems perspective, the study situates workplace applications of AI within broader structural and institutional trajectories. Empirically, the research draws on extensive fieldwork using a sequential mixed-methods exploratory case study design.

The scope was further refined to selected use cases across Information Technology and IT-enabled Services (IT/ITES), Visual and Sound Effects (VFX/SFX), Computer-Aided Design/Manufacturing/Engineering (CAD/CAM/CAE), healthcare, news media, and academia. Semi-structured interviews across the aforementioned industry use cases are used to examine where and how AI is deployed in white-collar work, how tasks are reorganised, and how these processes relate to augmentation, automation, and deskilling.

An ongoing quantitative survey designed to check the prevalence of deskilling mechanism, derived from qualitative insights, extends this analysis to determine whether shared systemic constraints (e.g., deployment incentives, technology maturity limits, or governance policies) exist, identify structural challenges for policy making and broader patterns in the larger population, and generate abductive, policy-relevant hypotheses about technological adoption and labour transformation. Normatively, the project advances an anticipatory governance framework grounded in the recognition that conventional *ex post* causal evaluation of policy 'effects' is premature for an emergent and globally entangled technology such as AI.

Engaging the Collingridge dilemma (a quandary in which efforts to influence future development face a double bind problem), the research seeks to develop an adaptive *ex ante* analytical approach capable of informing both technological design and regulatory strategy under conditions of uncertainty, while remaining attentive to

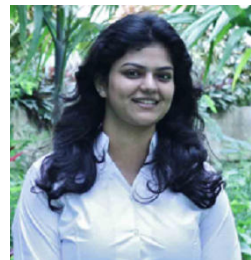
questions of equity, institutional capacity, and the future of work.



Abhishek Sharad Mali presenting his work on white-collar workspaces and AI at various venues

What of Justice in the Age of Automation? –AI and the Judiciary

Avnika Nagar



This study examines the integration of AI and ML technologies within the Indian judiciary, particularly in the context of persistent case backlogs and policy narratives that position technology as a solution to delays in justice delivery. The

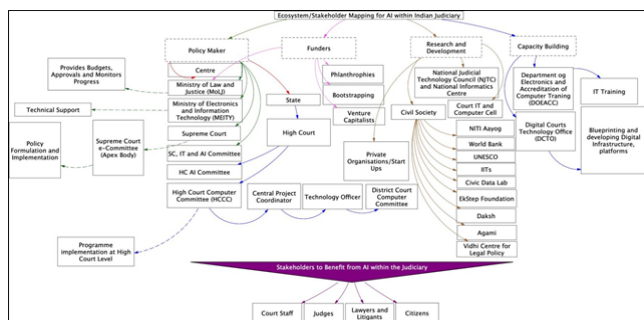
study finds that current applications of AI have largely been limited to information-processing functions, such as translation, transcription, legal research, and chatbot-based assistance. While these applications contribute to incremental modernisation and administrative efficiency, they do not yet represent a transformative shift in judicial decision-making or institutional functioning, contrary to certain policy and technological narratives.

The study further argues that although applications such as predictive analytics and decision-making tools have largely remained in the background, two important considerations merit attention. First, even when AI systems function as auxiliary tools, algorithmic outputs can indirectly influence human decision-making by shaping how legal information is interpreted and used. Second, emerging policy discussions increasingly envision deeper technological integration, raising questions

about the judiciary's preparedness for more direct forms of AI-enabled decision support.

In light of these developments, the study highlights the technical and normative challenges associated with integrating AI into the judiciary. It underscores the importance of addressing the structural factors contributing to case pendency while carefully managing the risks and limitations of emerging technologies.

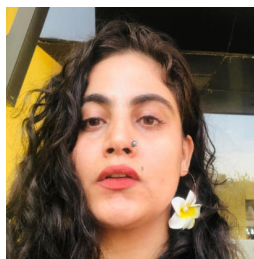
In the public policy space, the study is significant because it contributes to a more grounded, evidence-based discourse on technology-led judicial reform. At a time when AI is increasingly positioned as a solution to governance challenges, the research offers a critical perspective on the possibilities and limitations of technological interventions in justice delivery. By highlighting institutional, ethical, and governance considerations, the study offers insights for policymakers on designing responsible AI strategies that strengthen judicial efficiency while safeguarding people's rights.



Stakeholder mapping for AI within Indian judiciary, from the work of Avnika Nagar

Investigating Misogynist Tropes, Agents, and Communities on Social Media Platforms

Nikita Amar Jha



Over the past decade, digital platforms have become central arenas of political communication in India. Public debate, political commentary, and everyday discussions increasingly take place in the digital sphere. These spaces promise greater

participation and visibility, yet they have also become environments where hostility toward women has become routine and highly visible. Misogyny in India's digital public sphere cannot be understood simply as the product of individual anger or isolated online behaviour. Rather, it often appears as systemic patterned discourse that circulates through repeated narratives, shared language, and familiar rhetorical strategies. Women who participate in public conversations frequently encounter responses

that question their morality, credibility, or legitimacy in political debate. Such responses are rarely spontaneous; they rather draw on widely circulating narratives that frame women's public speech as disruptive, immoral, or threatening to social order.

Importantly, misogyny in digital spaces does not operate in isolation. It is closely entangled with existing structures of power, including caste hierarchies, religious majoritarianism, and nationalist political discourse. In this context, misogynistic rhetoric frequently functions as a way of reinforcing broader social hierarchies. Women who speak critically about politics or social issues are often portrayed not simply as wrong but as illegitimate participants in the public sphere.

When these narratives spread repeatedly across digital platforms, they begin to shape the boundaries of public debate. Misogyny becomes part of the everyday grammar of online political discussion. Over time, this normalisation has wider implications. It affects who feels able to participate in public conversations and whose voices are marginalised or silenced. For scholars concerned with governance and public policy, these dynamics highlight an important challenge.

As digital platforms increasingly operate as infrastructures of public discourse, the normalisation of misogynistic speech within them raises serious questions about the quality, inclusiveness, and democratic character of contemporary public debate.

The Automated Walled Garden –AI Content Moderation

Iznallah



Online speech today is governed less by judges and parliaments and more by a dense web of algorithms, platform rulebooks, and executive orders, morphing into a regime where the rule of law dissolves into procedural shadow-play

and democratic accountability for public discourse thins to a vanishing point. My doctoral research poses the stark question: when AI assumes the mantle of speech arbiter, who truly wields power, and whose voices vanish into engineered silence?

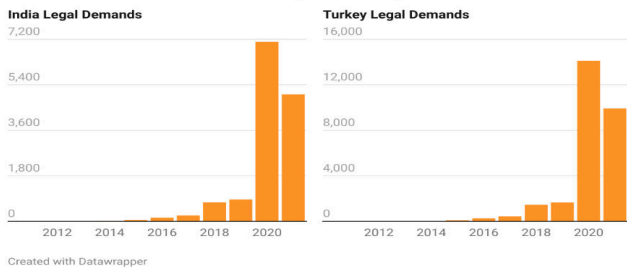
Over four years, the study has followed content moderation as it has moved from a technical 'clean-up' problem to a core site of state and corporate power. The first phase of the research mapped how platform capitalism, government interests, and Western ethnocentric bias quietly shape what is labelled 'acceptable' speech, showing that neutrality in moderation is largely a myth. Later work reviewed automated content moderation systems themselves through questions such as how AI

models are trained, how toxic speech is understood and detected, juxtaposed with how vague community guidelines are operationalised, and how new laws in India, the EU, and elsewhere push platforms to act as quasi-regulators.

The empirical centre of the project brings together two vantage points: an 'above-the-line' view of state-platform power drawn from nearly 1,500 government takedown requests to X (Twitter) in two comparable chosen case-study jurisdictions namely India and Turkey. The study documents how legal ambiguity is used to target dissent, journalism and minorities while platforms depart from their own stated principles, and a 'from-below' view of nearly 400 users across India, Turkey and the US who describe, in their own terms, how AI-driven moderation feels in practice, what gets erased, what gets explained, and how it quietly pushes people towards self-censorship and workarounds rather than open democratic speech.

For public policy and AI governance, the argument is that moderation must be treated as a problem of democratic accountability, not just of safety or innovation. The study proposes a user-centred audit frame for AI in content moderation, grounded in human rights and public law, that brings together three layers too often treated in isolation: state takedown power, platform governance, and users' own sense of fairness and trust. If AI is to govern the digital public sphere, it cannot remain a black box.

State Takedown Demands (2012-21)



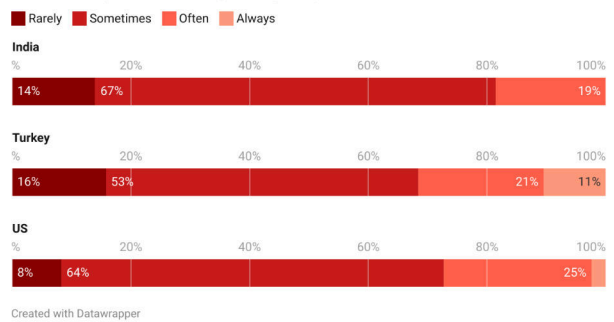
Trend of rise in legal demands for takedowns on X (Source: X Transparency Reports), from the work of Iznallah

Perceived Fairness



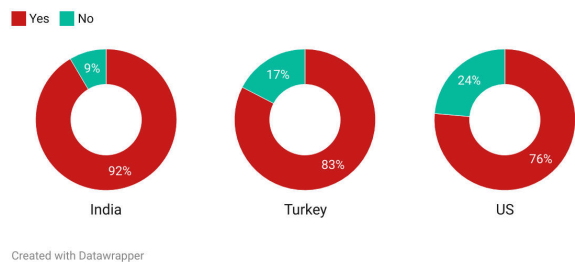
Perception-behaviour paradox: Fairness vs self-censorship (Source: Author survey findings)

Frequency of Altering Language



Frequency of altering language

Altering Language to Avoid Moderation



Altering language to avoid moderation

Investigating the Narrative Landscape of AI Governance

Purnima Rohilla



AI is no longer confined to commercial applications. Governments have increasingly integrated AI into the essential machinery of the state, from policing and surveillance to the judiciary and law enforcement. The pace of deployment has left

the industry and regulators grappling with AI governance.

In the Indian AI landscape alone, the last few months have seen major updates, including new foundational models, sovereign AI ambitions, government-backed compute missions, and a range of startups claiming to have solved problems across various sectors. The recent AI Impact Summit in Delhi was a defining milestone amid the AI buzz, with numerous discussions, keynotes, and press releases establishing a powerful new narrative: 'India wants to shape the global AI agenda, not just follow it'.

During the Summit, certain voices were unmistakably dominant. Phrases like 'Sovereign AI', 'indigenous LLMs', and 'AI for Viksit Bharat' took centre stage. These were not just words. They were frames: carefully chosen vocabulary that shapes how we think about AI, what we prioritise, and what we overlook. As a scholar, I look past the surface-level excitement to ask a more fundamental

question: Who is shaping these narratives, and to what end?

In public policy, we often discuss 'the act of framing'. Framing is not a neutral act; it is a scholarly concept that explains how the way we talk about a problem dictates the solutions we create. By setting the agenda, dominant stakeholders, often from industry or high-level government, hold the power to decide which issues are 'urgent' and which are to be 'brushed under the carpet'. Each actor (stakeholder) brings a frame, and these frames collectively set the agenda for policymaking.

If we do not analyse these narratives as they unfold, we risk the dominant or louder stakeholder dictating the terms of governance in the future. My PhD research interrogates this 'India AI' discourse while the oven is still hot and tracks how AI governance discourse is constructed in real time across policy documents, summit proceedings, media coverage, and public statements. The aim of my research is two-fold. First, to uncover whose voices are heard and whose concerns are sidelined in India's national AI conversation. Second, to examine whether the governance conversation is moving towards concrete regulatory frameworks, or whether we are caught in an endless loop of buzzwords while the technology races ahead unchecked and ungoverned.

Ultimately, my work seeks to ensure that, as India builds its AI future, the policy frameworks we develop are not just reactions to tech hype but are informed by the diverse voices that make up our society.



Representative photo from the recent AI Summit in New Delhi, India, clicked by Purnima Rohilla

Concluding Remarks: Insights Obtained from the above Projects for Governance of AI and 'Digital Society'

Governance of AI systems and the attendant digital society are non-trivial but urgent policy problems to address. The above projects indicate one common but concerning theme, that often, such systems are introduced due to market logic in complex social contexts, due to the state abandoning its policy and welfare duties, and as a consequence of technosolutionist ideology, the tendency of a solution looking for a problem. Even at the discursive

level of governance, if the conceptual categories are built on techno-optimistic but fundamentally false priors, they mystify rather than explain, much less solve, any policy problems.

These systems are fundamentally stochastic, data-hungry, and error-prone, and thus their unwise use is socially damaging. Whether in justice, public speech, or workplaces, it is vital not to sacrifice law and people's rights for unproven claims of productivity, nor to introduce automation for its own sake. Thus, institution building, which lays the basic blocks for protecting labour, focuses on transparency in procurement and tendering processes, proper spending of public resources, prevention of scope creep, and fraud ('snake oil AI'), is vital. In workplaces, the use of AI, whether in white-collar offices or precarious platform work, has the potential to depress wages, severely erode working-class power, and induce deskilling. It is especially a policy problem because this is not just about protecting consumer and individual rights, such as privacy, when AI commodities are used, but, more importantly, about protecting economic and labour rights, as these systems alter how our communities run and how work is done. After all, algorithmic systems and datasets do not appear out of thin air; they are either extracted from the digital commons or curated and built in exploitative ways, intensifying extant economic issues. Solving this requires developing regulations and democratic oversight mechanisms.

Policy Talks

7 January 2026

Grievance Redressal and Public Service Delivery

Dr William O'Brochta, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Texas Lutheran University (US)

Using data from Indian cities, the talk showed that citizens and officials relied on both formal and informal channels despite low confidence in outcomes, with implications for public service delivery.



14 January 2026

Indian Perspectives on Internationalisation of Higher Education

Prof. N. V. Varghese, Former Vice Chancellor, NIEPA, New Delhi and Distinguished Visiting Professor, ADCPS

Foreign degrees remained highly valued in India, while changing visa policies created uncertainty in student mobility. Transnational education through foreign university campuses in India, emerged as an alternative. The seminar examined these evolving trends in cross-border higher education.



16 January 2026

High-Trust Networks and Low-Yield Access: Understanding Inequality in Indian Cinema

Dr Akhil Alha, Assistant Professor, Council for Social Development, New Delhi

The talk showed how Bollywood jobs relied on informal networks and personal connections, limiting access to key roles and reinforcing inequality.



20 February 2026

The Uneven State: Bureaucratic Preferences & State Capacity in India

Prof. Anustubh Agnihotri, Assistant Professor, Ashoka University

The talk explored why governance outcomes varied across regions, highlighting the role of mid-level bureaucrats and their transfer preferences.



28 January 2026

How to Write Winning Grants for Policy and Social Impact Projects

Mr Saikat Panda, Founder of Socialys Evidentia Global Consulting Saikat, drawing on real-world experience, introduced the essentials of writing strong grant proposals, focusing on clear problem statements, outcomes, and effective communication with funders.



11 March 2026

Reflections on AI in (NYC) Government

Dr Neal Parikh, Adjunct Associate Professor, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

Drawing on experience as NYC's first Director of AI, the talk highlighted key insights on governance, real-world challenges, and lessons for those interested in AI policy.



18 February 2026

Equity - Efficiency - Sustainability Trade-offs in Public Investments for Agricultural Water Management

Dr Pooja Prasad, Assistant Professor, School of Public Policy, IIT Delhi

Highlighting the importance of equitable access through a case study of a bore well pooling programme in Andhra Pradesh, the talk showed how shared water systems could support rainfed farmers while raising questions about equity, efficiency, and sustainability.



12 March 2026

Forest Rights and Conservation related Legislations: The Interface

Dr Arvind Kumar Jha, IFS (Retd.) Former PCCF & DG(SFD), and Commissioner (Tribal Department), Maharashtra

Examined the complex intersection of forest rights and conservation laws in India.



18 March 2026

Sovereign AI: Why Nations Must Build Their Own AI Capabilities

Mr Abhishek Verma, Partner and the Lead for Digital Government Advisory at KPMG India

Explored the importance of sovereign AI for India, emphasising the need for domestic capabilities in infrastructure, data, and talent.



25 March 2026

Beyond the Hype: Forwarding Comparative Research on Policy Innovation Labs (PILs) of the Global South

Dr Ishani Mukherjee, Associate Professor of Public Policy, SMU and Visiting Associate Professor, ADCPS

Examined the rise of Policy Innovation Labs (PILs) and the lack of clear frameworks to study their impact.



Book Discussion & Workshops

14 January 2026

Book Discussion on 'The Practice of Visual Ethnography: Examining Identity and Lived Experiences of Marginalised Communities'

Resource Person: Prof. Deepanshu Mohan, Professor, O. P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, India

Highlighted visual ethnography as a powerful tool to understand and represent marginalised communities through innovative visual storytelling methods.



09 February 2026

Workshop on 'Streamlining Qualitative Data Analysis with MAXQDA'

Resource Person: Ms Sarah Harniswala, PhD Scholar, ADCPS

Introduced MAXQDA as a practical tool for analysing qualitative data, helping researchers move from large datasets to systematic insights through coding, visualisation, and collaborative features.



14-15 February 2026

CEP Short-Term Course on 'Governance of Digital Technologies'

Resource Persons: Prof. Shishir K. Jha, Dr Anupam Guha, Dr Sun-deep Oberoi, and Dr Santosh Noronha

Explored digital governance, AI, data flows, and health platforms through both conceptual and practical insights.



24-27 March 2026

Workshop on 'Evidence-Based Policymaking (EBPM): A Primer on Impact Evaluation (IE) Methods'

Resource Person: Dr Ishani Mukherjee, Associate Professor, SMU and Visiting Faculty, ADCPS and Ms Aparna Krishnan, Senior Advisor, J-PAL South Asia

Introduced EBPM and IE, programme theory of change, mixed methods, and best practices for high-quality impact evaluations.



Events Scheduled for 2026 Q2

08 April 2026 · Ms Zohra Mutabanna, Associate Director, StudioPOD

Policy Talk: Breaking Down the National Urban Transport Policy: Why Vision has not Translated into Outcomes

17 April 2026 · Mr Yash Agarwal, Global Stakeholder Engagement Manager, ICANN and Founder, Public Policy India

Policy Talk: Introduction to Policy-making in India and Building Meaningful Careers in this Space

22 April 2026 · Dr Kanthi Swaroop, Research Fellow, ADCPS, IIT Bombay

Policy Talk: The Image-Trap of Neoliberal Urban Governance: Caste, Policy, and Waste Work in Hyderabad

Visitors & Distinguished Guests

Prof. Anand Patwardhan, Professor, School of Public Policy (SPP), University of Maryland, USA, visited the ADCPS on 1 March 2026 to explore future collaborations between ADCPS and SPP.

A team from the **Public Diplomacy (PD) Section of the US Consulate General**, Mumbai visited the ADCPS on 6 March 2026 to explore potential avenues for collaboration.

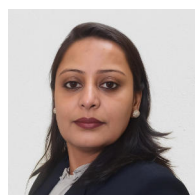
Awards & Honours



Dr Himanshu Burte, Associate Professor

Invited to join the International Advisory Board of the Manchester Urban Institute (MUI), University of Manchester, UK recognising his expertise and contributions to urban studies. In this role, he will provide strategic guidance and support global collaborations.

PhD Defended



Devasmita Jha

Thesis: Algorithmic Management, Negotiating Precarity in the Absence of Regulation: Case Study of India's Ride Hailing Industry

Defended on: 26 February 2026

Supervisor: Prof. Shishir K. Jha



Sneha Swami

Thesis: Beyond the Blame Game: Street-Level Bureaucracy and Delivery of Last-mile Electricity Services

Defended on: 23 March 2026

Supervisor: Prof. Subodh Wagle

Publications

Narayanan, N. C. (2026). Walking the razor's edge: Politics of ecological governance in Kerala. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 61(13), 13–17.

Rabbani, G., Rajesh Raj, S. N., & **Kathuria, V.** (2026). Labour regulation and firm transition in Indian manufacturing. *International Journal of the Economics of Business*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13571516.2026.2631387>

Sarath, K. T., Mishra, T., & Banerjee, R. (2026). A multidimensional urban transport equity assessment framework: A case of Mumbai. *Cities*, 169, Article 106503. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2025.106503>

Krishnakutty, M., & Sundaresan, J. (2026). Is participatory local planning possible in India? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 61(6), 53–59.

Sapkal, R., **Chakma, K.**, & Parmar, D. (2026). A race to nowhere: Do longer working hours lead to increased productivity? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 61(6), 33–40.

Note: Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information presented in this newsletter. However, if any errors have inadvertently slipped in, we regret them in advance and would be grateful if you could bring them to our attention. For any feedback, queries, or further information, please contact us at office.cps@iitb.ac.in or 022 2576 5061.