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Latin America in the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Toward a Policy and Cooperation Agenda

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Abstract

As a general-purpose technology, AI affects all dimensions of social dynamics, and it is spreading rapidly around the world. However, the pace of AI development varies globally, and its potential and risks are distributed differently within contemporary global governance. This threatens to deepen historical inequalities and exclude much of humanity from its benefits. Latin America, for its part, is a region lagging behind in AI development and facing pressing needs, such as improving state capacities. Thus, this research aims to analyze how Latin America can leverage AI to promote greater social well-being. This research falls within the field of Global Studies and adopts an analytical approach to multilevel issue – oriented.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI); Latin America; state capacities; international cooperation; social welfare
JEL: F01, O33, O54

Introduction

The potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to transform humanity is comparable only to the emergence of fire and electricity. As a general-purpose technology, AI affects all dimensions of social dynamics, and it is spreading rapidly around the world. AI is transforming an already hyperconnected society into a digitized one, encompassing telemedicine, digital education, and e-governance. However, this technology is advancing at different rates around the world. Its potential and risks are distributed unevenly within contemporary

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global governance, which threatens to exacerbate historical inequalities and exclude much of humanity from its benefits.

Latin America, for its part, is a region lagging behind in AI development and facing pressing needs, such as improving state capacities to ensure higher-quality democracies and more efficient public policies. Therefore, this research aims to analyze how Latin America can use AI to promote greater social well-being. This research falls within the field of Global Studies and adopts an analytical approach to multilevel issue–oriented. It takes the form of action research, providing an analytical framework and case studies from which a policy agenda is derived for implementation. The research is presented in two parts.

The first part of the study outlines the main potential of AI, its current state, and its adoption capacity in Latin America. The study proposes a set of multisectoral AI policies aimed at social well-being. These policies include horizontal practices such as data governance, open-source initiatives, open-government promotion, and the utilization of AI-driven nudges. They also include territorial approaches, such as smart cities. Additionally, it proposes vertical policies in critical development areas such as health, nutrition, and education.

The second section examines contemporary global AI governance dynamics, emphasizing the significant concentration of capabilities and power in the United States and China. The section emphasizes the importance of international cooperation so that Latin America can harness the potential of AI and gain greater agency in its governance. To this end, the study proposes an ecosystem of regional, South-South, and triangular cooperation.

Latin America in the age of AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) encompasses a wide range of computational techniques, including logic-based automated decision-making systems and large language models based on deep neural networks. AI has significant potential to enhance the capabilities of the public sector, improve access to public services, and foster greater citizen participation.

However, as Acemoglu and Johnson (2023) caution, technological development does not automatically lead to social well-being. Historically, it has been the elites who have appropriated the gains from technological changes, from improvements such as better plows and windmills in medieval agriculture between 1000 and 1300 to the early phase of the Industrial Revolution. Elites impose a vision that favors automation and surveillance, which allows them to reduce labor costs and strengthen their control over the production process, often at the expense of workers. In other words, as the UNDP (2025) points out, technology co-evolves with, and is co-determined by, political institutions.

Thus, technology is neither politically nor economically neutral. Therefore, an agenda that aims to use technology to promote social well-being cannot allow technocrats and the market to solely drive technological change. Since all technology is not neutral and its impact on society is not predetermined, AI governance and public policy are necessary to harness this technology for the greater well-being of humanity.

In particular, AI is following a notably elitist trajectory centered on automation, surveillance, and mass data collection. The focus has been on achieving human parity by imitating or surpassing human intelligence. This has led to the creation of autonomous systems designed to replace workers rather than complement them. In turn, companies reduce labor costs without significantly increasing productivity. While this design may be relevant for Northern countries that develop these technologies and whose working-age population is declining, it is not relevant for countries in the Global South. These countries must prioritize the creation of quality jobs in their development agendas (Acemoglu and Johnson, 2023).

In terms of economic growth, the 2025 UNCTAD Report on Technology and Innovation views artificial intelligence (AI) and other cutting-edge technologies as potential drivers of the global economy (UNCTAD, 2025). AI has boosted the platform economy, which is an economic activity facilitated by technological platforms and data-driven business models. In this economy, as the number of producers and consumers increases, the value of the service increases for all participants. This enables large-scale operations with marginal costs close to zero and eliminates unnecessary intermediaries (UNOSSC, 2018). However, the actual impact of AI on employment and productivity, especially generative AI (GAI), is limited by structural factors such as inadequate digital infrastructure, poor connectivity, and deficits in digital literacy and skills. In Latin America, these factors reveal fragmentation. Combined with persistent social, territorial, and organizational gaps, this fragmentation limits the reach of innovations and may amplify existing inequalities (SEGIB, 2025). Additionally, as noted in UNCTAD (2025), a small number of multinational companies control AI development and deployment, managing investment budgets that far exceed those of many governments. These companies often prioritize commercial profit over social objectives.

In this context, most Latin American countries are ranked in the upper-middle or lower-middle groups in terms of technological readiness. Brazil and Chile lead the region, ranking 38th and 45th globally, respectively (UNCTAD, 2025). Another analytical tool, the Latin American Artificial Intelligence Index, analyzes the region's diversity in AI, highlighting its heterogeneity and warning of the potential for fragmentation.

This index comprises three sub-indices:

- ✓ Enabling Factors, which includes infrastructure such as connectivity, computing power, data, and human talent;
- ✓ Governance, which incorporates vision, the institutional framework, international engagement, and regulation; and
- ✓ Research, Development, and Adoption.

Based on these elements, countries in the region are categorized into groups: the Pioneers (Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay); the Adopters (Colombia, Costa Rica, Argentina, Peru, Mexico, Ecuador, and Panama); The third group is the Explorers, which includes El Salvador, Paraguay, Guatemala, Honduras, Bolivia, and Venezuela. The report also notes that Brazil accounts for over 90% of the region's high-performance computing capacity and that

Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia together account for 90% of the region's AI publications. Significant progress is also noted in Ecuador due to its substantial and cross-cutting improvements in data availability, in Costa Rica due to its establishment as a leader in human talent, and in Guatemala due to its status as the regional leader in IPv6 adoption (ECLAC, 2025).

Of particular concern is the chronic investment deficit, relative to the region's global economic weight. Latin America accounts for 8.8% of the world's population and 6.6% of global GDP, yet attracts only 1.12% of global AI investment (ECLAC, 2025). This undermines the development of AI's potential and serves as a major warning that the region will be left behind in technological progress if adequate investment and policies are not implemented, thereby deepening historical inequalities.

In AI management, high-level governance committees must ensure multi-year budget continuity and have the capacity to make critical operational decisions. They must adopt scalable approaches with modular projects that start with limited scope but have documented scaling potential. These projects should generate reusable templates to enable other agencies to replicate successes. They should also establish KPIs and mechanisms for AI systems to learn from real-world data. This will prevent the systems from becoming obsolete once they leave the laboratory. Additionally, a national data strategy and the appointment of a government data officer are necessary. The data officer would break down institutional silos and ensure that data is interoperable and of sufficient quality to be exploited on a large scale (Martorell and Porrúa, 2026).

Data dynamics warrant special attention because AI enables the intensive use of data. AI's ability to process large volumes of data, identify complex patterns, and generate solutions tailored to local contexts makes this technology instrumental for governments and public policies. By processing large volumes of data with AI tools, governments and the private sector can improve their decision-making processes and optimize their offerings, turning digitized knowledge into a strategic factor in public policy and production.

However, in order for this potential to be realized, AI requires reliable, accessible, and technically integrated data flows in order to train models, generate predictions, and deliver valuable services. Order and structure are required for the application of data and the extraction of value from it.

According to SEGIB (2025), AI systems require robust data storage and processing capabilities, as well as technological environments that ensure security, efficiency, and control. Without adequate local infrastructure, including data centers, interconnection nodes, and computing resources, countries in the region will face significant limitations in developing their own AI solutions tailored to their contexts and needs. Reliable availability of data and mechanisms for its collection, storage, and processing are also prerequisites for training AI systems and evidence-based decision-making.

Data fragmentation is evident in Latin America, resulting from data silos and poor coordination among existing functions. Therefore, the various responsibilities regarding data must be aligned and data literacy must be increased within the public sector to ensure

policy coherence (OECD and CAF, 2024). Digital agendas must prioritize data privacy and security by establishing clear rules for the use of big data and the operation of algorithms to prevent bias and discrimination.

In response to these needs, the Vía Latam initiative for AI development aims to transform the intensive use of AI into real productive capacity. Its strategy is based on creating high-quality public datasets that are treated as digital public assets. These datasets are stored in shared infrastructure with regional computing centers that are accessible to startups and universities. This fosters collective learning and algorithmic transparency. The goal is for countries to not only consume technology, but also to understand and audit how decisions are made (ECLAC, 2025).

Another important practice is open source. In Latin America, it is considered one of the most strategic and equitable opportunities for AI development. Unlike other technological areas, which require massive investments, the open-source model enables the region to develop locally relevant solutions with greater transparency and independence from costly licenses. In countries with less-established ecosystems, open-source productivity tends to be significantly higher. Honduras, Paraguay, and Bolivia are leading the region in this regard (ECLAC, 2025).

In terms of institutional frameworks, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico have proposed or drafted AI legislation, and Brazil and Costa Rica have national AI strategies. Of particular interest is Costa Rica's approach, which prioritizes the digital inclusion of rural communities, indigenous peoples, and young people through community innovation labs. Across Latin America, AI strategies are characterized by an increasing effort to establish regulatory frameworks and national strategies. However, they face significant structural challenges regarding infrastructure and access (ITU, 2025/a).

It is also important that countries in the region have compatible regulations to facilitate collaboration on regional security and risk management issues. Similarly, mechanisms must be created to ensure that security assessments and certifications of AI systems conducted in one country are recognized by others. This reduces administrative costs for governments.

This illustrates a vicious cycle: states with limited capacities cannot adequately incorporate AI into their administration, which prevents them from realizing AI's full potential to enhance state capabilities. This dynamic is significant because state capacities are essential for public policies to promote citizen well-being, and AI is a powerful tool for improving government activities and public policies.

States in Latin America have been characterized by low capacity due to the dynamics of patrimonialism and patronage networks at the local level. This creates what is known as the middle-quality institutional trap, in which democracy has been the dominant regime since the 1990s but has maintained low-quality democracies and medium levels of development (Mazzuca and Munck, 2020). These dynamics are the result of historical factors, but they are not insurmountable. The emergence of AI presents a significant opportunity to enhance state and government capacity.

Similarly, it is important to note that the delivery of public services is the most direct connection between the government and its citizens. AI can enhance the quality, accessibility, and responsiveness of public administration, thereby promoting higher levels of well-being and greater citizen satisfaction with government institutions. AI enables the development of accessible services, such as virtual assistants, which enhance the citizen experience and alleviate congestion in physical offices. AI also automates routine tasks, enabling staff to focus on more complex activities.

In order to achieve this, governments must strengthen their AI-related bureaucracies. Latin American countries can consider replicating successful strategies in the region. For instance, Spain's National Institute of Public Administration (INAP) has incorporated AI literacy into its 2025–2028 learning strategy for public officials. This strategy focuses on the ethical use of AI and automating routine tasks to enhance the productivity of public services. The United Arab Emirates, in collaboration with Microsoft, launched the 1 million AI Talents program to equip government teams with AI skills (ITU, 2025/b).

AI is an important tool for open government and the new problem-solving practice. This approach is characterized by agile, citizen-centered methodologies; problem-specific management; and impact measurement. It operates within a framework of continuous interaction with citizens and leverages government portals to create a less rigid and more cooperative bureaucracy. Digital transformation units serve as knowledge banks for innovation and state transformation. This approach improves intergovernmental and interjurisdictional coordination of policies, programs, and service delivery (Oszlak, 2022). Transparency is the prerequisite upon which the open state is built. When a state adopts a philosophy of openness, transparency becomes a proactive stance rather than a reactive response to requests for information. In this stance, transparency guarantees integrity within the open state model. Exposing decision-making processes to public scrutiny creates incentives for ethical action. In the open government ecosystem, transparency is a fundamental tool for co-creating public value.

Public policy must educate the public about the strengths and limitations of AI and AI decision-making processes. It must also create spaces for collaboration to develop AI solutions that align with social values. These steps are fundamental to maintaining trust in public policies. Providing clear explanations of AI decision-making processes increases the government’s legitimacy and citizens’ trust in its policies.

Developing algorithm inventories with systematized, accessible records of AI systems promotes transparency and accountability. These inventories lay the technical and organizational groundwork for designing policies that oversee, assess the impact of, and continuously improve AI systems. These inventories also enable the identification of best practices, the mapping of risks, the detection of potential biases, and the promotion of learning (SEGIB, 2025).

Thus, public services must be at the center of a good governance and development agenda. However, Latin America continues to focus on developing basic components and administrative simplification. Meanwhile, the digitization of public services in OECD

countries centers on user research and design that puts the user at the center. Furthermore, Latin American countries are failing to implement comprehensive, coherent mechanisms to monitor digital government policy implementation. To address these challenges, Latin American countries must develop standardized methodologies to measure user experience and apply this knowledge to the design and implementation of digital transformation initiatives, fostering a user-oriented culture (OECD and CAF, 2024).

It should be noted that there is a strong correlation between the degree to which a sector is digitized and its level of AI adoption. This suggests that more advanced technologies require developed digital ecosystems to be effective (ECLAC, 2021). Unlike electricity or the internet, however, access to AI does not require additional physical infrastructure. It is immediately accessible to those who are connected.

For this reason, AI implementation policies in Latin America must be adapted to the region's infrastructure. This includes providing solutions that work without internet access or with limited power, as well as developing more applications that leverage open or unstructured data sources to compensate for the lack of official records. It is also important to utilize chatbots in local languages or with intuitive icons so that people with low digital literacy can use the technology.

AI applications are spreading across various key government functions in the Latin American public sector. For instance, virtual assistants and chatbots are employed to address citizen inquiries and deliver local services; Chatico in Bogotá is one such example. In justice administration and law enforcement, AI is used to manage workloads, improve public safety, and speed up the classification of files by processing cases and automating administrative tasks. This drastically reduces response times, as seen with systems like Prometea in Argentina and VICTOR in Brazil. AI is also being used in public procurement to analyze bids and contracts, automatically detecting irregularities and collusion. One example is the Alice robot in Brazil (OECD, 2025/a).

Another interesting tool is AI-powered nudges. According to Sunstein and Thaler (2009), a nudge is any aspect of the decision-making architecture that modifies people's behavior in a predictable way without prohibiting any options or significantly altering their economic incentives. This micro-institutional design approach enables the government to guide citizens toward greater well-being. When combined with AI, it creates a personalized decision-making architecture in which digital interfaces act as behavioral agents.

Training in AI technologies for public administration must address all levels, as local governments are on the front lines of public service delivery. In this territorialized approach, smart cities deserve special mention. Cities have historically been engines of human progress and settings for conflicts. Therefore, smart cities are important because they have the potential to use AI as a management tool to transform into resilient, efficient, and empathetic ecosystems.

Several Latin American cities are featured in the 2020 Smart Cities Index. Notable examples include Medellín, which has a Smart Mobility System (SIMM) that uses security cameras, monitors weather and air quality, and implements participatory budgeting and

open data. Buenos Aires stands out as well, thanks to its real-time public transportation tracking system, vehicle monitoring via cameras, LED streetlights, and a wide range of online services. Similarly, São Paulo developed the Urban Futurability project to provide smart electricity services and implement video surveillance and traffic monitoring using Internet-connected cameras. Finally, Mexico City and Santiago de Chile are recognized for their air and weather monitoring systems (ECLAC, 2021). Within the Network of Ibero-American Capital Cities framework, Buenos Aires is leading an initiative with Madrid and Bogotá. This initiative aims to facilitate interaction between citizens and public administration by designing and implementing chatbots, diagnostic tools, and AI-based communication channels (SEGIB, 2025).

Improving basic infrastructure in rural and hard-to-reach areas is essential to laying the groundwork for inclusive digitalization. Access to electricity and connectivity is an indispensable prerequisite for AI technologies to generate social benefits and avoid widening existing gaps by limiting their impact to urban areas. Territorialized policies enable the development of useful, contextualized AI with a real impact on citizens. These policies allow for co-design with local actors and focus on specific needs. This also contributes to translating models into the local linguistic reality, representing a real opportunity for value creation. However, identification is a prerequisite for citizens to benefit from these practices. A digital identity can facilitate citizen interaction with the government and promote inclusion.

Much of the population in Latin America lacks formal identification. AI is a technology that can promote the development and optimization of digital identity infrastructure. Integrating AI algorithms into identity systems enables the automation and streamlining of verification and authentication processes, significantly strengthening security and reliability. A digital identity would enable millions of people to quickly and securely open bank accounts, apply for loans, receive subsidies, and access social and educational programs without intermediaries, thereby reducing bureaucracy and corruption (SEGIB, 2025).

Public mistrust of cyberattacks is also a barrier to deploying AI, especially for identity purposes. This mistrust stems from numerous data breaches and hacking incidents. However, AI can contribute to cybersecurity efforts.

This set of public policies is essential for achieving high social esteem. To harness the potential of AI for social well-being, the government and public policies must also adopt a sector-specific approach to key elements of the development agenda, such as health and education.

In order to contribute to development, a public policy agenda for AI must prioritize a human capabilities approach. This approach focuses on substantive freedoms and opportunities in people's lives. The capabilities approach treats every human being as society’s ultimate goal. Specific fields of AI hold particular potential for improving human well-being and allow for the humanization of AI governance. An AI agenda centered on citizens must contribute to society’s capacity for agency.

The fundamental objective of development is to expand freedoms, social justice, and opportunities so that people can live long, healthy lives and learn to read, write, and calculate. Social policies in health and education are constitutive elements of development because health and education are development in and of themselves. Furthermore, they serve an instrumental function because they contribute to economic growth, generating greater economic opportunities, such as job creation, and providing more resources for social policies. Basic health and education capabilities allow us to understand the lives human beings lead and the opportunities available to them. Capacity building enables human beings to overcome economic and political barriers and live the lives they desire (Sen, 2000; Nussbaum, 2005).

In the health sector, AI is notable for its ability to improve preventive care and early disease detection, both of which are essential to primary health care and a human-centered health system. AI can generate high-quality data by improving the detection, classification, and monitoring of diseases through machine learning models in health systems. AI-based tools can empower people to manage non-communicable diseases by providing personalized medical information, lifestyle guidance, and treatment details. These tools can also support systematic reviews to better understand the links between diet, nutrition, and chronic diseases. Furthermore, coordination between medical and social care can improve by integrating data into medical records to ensure more coherent care. AI can also profile health needs and predict targeted interventions in close coordination with medical staff (UNDP, 2025).

AI-powered signal processing devices can improve real-time diagnoses by identifying subtle patterns in medical images and videos, recognizing disease associations, and detecting anomalies. These devices can also facilitate the early identification of health issues. Mobile apps, reminder systems, and AI chatbots can enhance communication with doctors and improve treatment adherence. Since non-communicable diseases account for most global mortality and morbidity, AI-based tools can address the growing burden of chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory diseases. Additionally, AI can contribute to health equity by facilitating telehealth services for individuals with limited mobility and those in rural and remote areas (UNDP, 2025). AI-assisted diagnostic models help reduce wait times at healthcare centers (SEGIB, 2025).

Digital transformation, driven by AI, generates greater operational agility and enables the personalization of products and services (ECLAC, 2021). For instance, synthetic biology tools like AlphaFold 3 can predict the structures and interactions of proteins and other biomolecules with great accuracy, which accelerates the development of personalized therapies. In the field of neurotechnology, the convergence of AI with brain-computer interfaces (BCIs) and immersive technologies provides new methods for treating mental health conditions and enhancing cognitive abilities (OECD, 2025/b).

Governments must ensure the safe and transparent integration of AI technologies into the healthcare system. Public trust is particularly important for the effective functioning of these technologies, and transparency through patient notification is crucial for maintaining

the reliability of healthcare systems. Institutions must prioritize the testing, validation, training, and continuous monitoring of AI applications in clinical and other health settings. The credibility of AI professionals also influences public trust, underscoring the need for external accreditation, regulatory guidance, and specialized AI training for healthcare personnel.

In terms of food security, a fundamental health sector goal, AI systems can identify signs of crop stress, disease, or pests exceptionally quickly—a critical factor for global nutrition as pests destroy nearly 40% of global crops annually. AI can also help farmers transition from general seasonal protocols to precise, real-time interventions. By analyzing satellite imagery, climate data, and soil conditions, AI can provide farmers with recommendations on the optimal timing for planting, irrigation, and fertilizer application (ITU, 2025/b).

AI has the potential to increase crop yields, reduce waste, and promote sustainable agricultural practices. This is particularly important because food security is fundamental to human dignity and rights. Without adequate food, other rights are compromised. Therefore, food security is considered a global public good, and feeding the projected 10 billion people by 2050 is one of the most pressing ethical priorities of our time.

In agribusiness, AI is used for crop monitoring, smart irrigation management, and harvesting. This enables farmers to produce more efficiently and sustainably (ECLAC, 2021). For instance, Colombia's International Center for Tropical Agriculture developed Tumaini, a mobile app that uses deep learning to diagnose banana plant diseases via photos with over 90% accuracy. The app can operate offline, making it useful in rural areas without stable internet connections (UNCTAD, 2025). Argentina and Brazil also use cloud-based geographic information systems to allow farmers to monitor crops with satellite imagery and process data to optimize input usage (ECLAC, 2021).

The FAO has initiatives that significantly impact agricultural policies. For instance, the LEAP Navigator uses AI to integrate environmental, production, and animal health data. This system aims to help producers in emerging economies monitor sustainability indicators and reduce losses due to disease. It aligns with the climate commitments of the Paris Agreement. The Hand-in-Hand Geospatial Platform is an open-access system that provides millions of data layers, agricultural statistics, and food security indicators for over 65 countries. This enables more targeted, evidence-based interventions (ITU, 2025/b). Other notable initiatives include Geospatial AI (GeoAI), which analyzes location data to provide granular insights, predict climate, monitor food security, and anticipate conflicts or natural disasters (Fournier-Tombs et al., 2026).

In education, AI is transforming learning by enabling personalized, lifelong education and improving assessment systems. It also has the potential to address global skills gaps. Intelligent tutoring systems (ITS), for example, adapt the pace and difficulty of lessons to each student. Additionally, customizable interfaces are valuable for students with diverse neurological or physical abilities. AI-powered applications can provide study assistance when educators or parents are short on time or resources, tailoring educational content to each student’s needs and predicting their next steps in the learning process. AI can also

gamify the learning experience to motivate students. Thus, AI has the potential to promote equity in education by bridging gaps in the face of resource scarcity.

It should be noted that AI cannot replace teachers. In fact, successfully integrating AI into education requires teacher collaboration and effective classroom practices that prioritize local educational objectives. Human interaction is crucial for defining learning outcomes.

Therefore, AI-based public policies have the potential to improve citizens' well-being and sense of agency. By shifting from generic solutions to hyper-personalized interventions, the government can eliminate the specific barriers preventing people from accessing essential goods and services. Through big data analysis, AI can detect patterns of exclusion that traditional statistics overlook, enabling targeted policies for historically marginalized communities. Furthermore, AI systems can streamline bureaucracy, bringing the government closer to citizens and expanding communication channels.

Thus, as previously discussed, AI is a multipurpose technology with a broad potential to contribute to social well-being in all its forms. Additionally, AI is multi-level, encompassing both the territorialized approach within the state, as discussed in this section, and the global level, where cooperation is essential for better integration into global AI governance. This topic is addressed in the following section.

International cooperation on AI

AI transcends national borders by providing intangible goods and services that can be used anywhere in the world. In the contemporary world, global governance of AI is fragmented and perpetuates existing inequalities, such as the high concentration of power in the United States and China. The development of AI and digital transformation have turned technology into a new axis of international relations. AI has made technology a field of power.

The gap in AI development and adoption is profound, marked by an extreme concentration of resources in the United States and China. These two countries are the leading owners of supercomputers, have more global data centers and cloud infrastructure than the rest of the world combined, and hold 60% of patents. In terms of private investment, the United States accounts for 70% of global investment, with China ranking second. The United States accounts for around 50% of investment and development (RandD), followed by China with 13% (UNCTAD, 2025). AI hardware consists of semiconductors, data centers, graphics processing units (GPUs), and high-performance power grids, all of which are concentrated in these two countries. These countries have made computing infrastructure a strategic priority, investing billions in energy-intensive facilities that enable the training of state-of-the-art models (SEGIB, 2025). More than 90% of high-performance computing centers operate in the United States, China, and the European Union, while over 150 countries have no centers at all (ITU, 2025). This factor is particularly significant because it concentrates power and raises barriers to entry for Latin American and Global South countries.

Additionally, the homogeneity of English-language training corpora, the lack of demographic and geographic diversity, and the centralization of technological development in the Global North have serious consequences for Latin America and the Global South. Large segments of these regions' populations are underrepresented or completely absent from the data that feeds the most widely used systems globally. Furthermore, the overrepresentation of certain populations, such as urban users, English speakers, and digital platform consumers, is not accidental. Rather, it stems from commercial logic that prioritizes scalability and monetization over inclusion and equity. These dynamics create a structural mismatch between the problems AI can solve and the realities local contexts in the Global South face (SEGIB, 2025). These dynamics mean that the advancement of AI is disconnected from the priorities of much of humanity. In fact, AI's application can produce inadequate and even discriminatory solutions, especially in sensitive sectors such as access to public services.

For these reasons, if Latin American countries want more control over the development of AI, they must cooperate. In the contemporary world, AI can be positioned as a priority area of international cooperation. Such cooperation enhances AI technology by integrating linguistic and cognitive resources. Governance and international cooperation in AI can ensure that it is treated as a global good.

As the final report of the United Nations High-Level Advisory Body on AI argues, establishing a global governance framework for this technology is urgent. This framework should not be left solely to market forces, but rather require a comprehensive, cross-cutting approach that encompasses the political, economic, social, and human rights domains. The framework's principles must be grounded in inclusivity, the public interest, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. It should have a normative foundation based on the United Nations Charter and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Additionally, data governance should be developed alongside the promotion of data commons. Therefore, political dialogue on AI governance is particularly important for establishing common ground in the global management of this technology and aligning efforts with human rights (United Nations, 2024).

AI governance must address the unique aspects of the political economy of AI. The AI-powered platform economy introduces digitized knowledge and information as new production factors. Unlike traditional factors, these factors can be used simultaneously by multiple users without being depleted, and they flow at speeds greater than traditional factors. In other words, the traditional economy, based on land, labor, and capital, has fundamentally been one of zero-sum competition. In contrast, the new AI-powered platform economy has the potential to be cooperative by nature. Therefore, partnerships should be structured to ensure that local priorities are not overshadowed by the interests of countries in the Global North. AI partnerships bring together diverse areas of expertise and could drive substantial investment in digital infrastructure, research, and talent development. Aligning the interests of government agencies, academic institutions, industry leaders, and the general public through these collaborations would help ensure that future AI progress

promotes well-being. AI safety frameworks must incorporate diverse perspectives and take into account regional ethics, governance structures, and social norms. This inclusivity is essential for strengthening AI safety outcomes and ensuring that its tools are contextually relevant and adaptable on a global scale (UNDP, 2025).

In order to shift contemporary patterns in AI dynamics toward global governance that aligns with these objectives and promotes global well-being, we must foster an ecosystem of international, regional, South-South, and triangular cooperation (Miranda, 2021). This will allow each of these approaches to contribute its full potential. This ecosystem of international cooperation can lead to more legitimate and efficient multilateral, multicentric, and multilevel governance. It is also essential for addressing disparities in digital infrastructure and capabilities, thereby enabling equitable access to AI.

Rather than merely being recipients or users of AI, Latin American countries must focus their efforts on becoming creators and equal partners in global governance. Technological inclusion should be understood as more than just access to tools; it should also be understood as the capacity for agency and a voice in AI governance. Regional cooperation in AI has the potential to bridge the gap between countries with advanced technology and those that need to develop or strengthen their national innovation systems. This cooperation can facilitate the transfer of technical and scientific knowledge, thereby enhancing the region's capabilities.

These cooperation frameworks must establish institutional ecosystems that promote ethical frameworks, set interoperability standards, and define global priorities for the ethical development and use of these technologies. At the regional level, efforts have been made in regulatory matters, building on the region’s historical continuity. For instance, the 2023 Santiago Declaration, the 2023 MERCOSUR Declaration on Human Rights Principles in the Field of AI, the Cartagena de Indias Declaration, and the 2024 Montevideo Declaration have all focused on promoting ethical AI and coordinating regional policies (ITU, 2025/a). Regional and global AI governance must harmonize and mutually recognize regulatory frameworks so that AI systems can operate across borders without compromising security or rights.

Regional cooperation should focus on creating strategic mechanisms that mobilize resources, capacities, and knowledge among countries at different levels of development. These mechanisms should facilitate solutions tailored to local contexts and the sharing of open-source tools and impact assessment methodologies. Furthermore, regional cooperation on AI should strengthen state capacities, facilitate technology transfer, and promote knowledge exchange.

In Latin America, regional data governance is essential for progress in areas such as designing and delivering cross-border public services and creating reliable data infrastructures that serve as the foundation for AI (OECD and CAF, 2024). Publicly accessible AI infrastructure, such as shared computing resources, open-source AI models, and publicly curated datasets, can democratize AI development and adoption. Furthermore, well-designed competition policies can foster a competitive and dynamic technological

ecosystem that drives innovation and ensures the widespread distribution of AI's benefits, rather than their concentration among a few dominant players (UNDP, 2025). The region must also invest in high-level infrastructure. For example, the most powerful systems in Latin America operate at 20 petaflops, while European systems reach 1,000 petaflops. Latin America can model itself after EuroHPC and establish a regional supercomputing consortium to acquire advanced computing capabilities, such as exascale computing, which are unattainable individually (Martorell and Porrúa, 2026).

LatamGPT is one of the most ambitious projects underway in the region. It is the first large language model (LLM) for artificial intelligence that was developed specifically for Latin America. It was trained using linguistic and cultural data from the region.

Coordinated by Chile's National Center for Artificial Intelligence (CENIA), this initiative brings together more than forty institutions from twelve countries to create an open, ethical tool that reflects regional diversity. The initiative's primary goal is to promote the region's technological sovereignty by developing a Latin American LLM that can address the linguistic, cultural, and social needs of the region's countries while preserving their diversity and strengthening their autonomy in AI. The model is trained on a multilingual corpus that prioritizes Spanish and Portuguese, as well as content in indigenous languages. By drawing on data provided by local stakeholders, such as universities, governments, and foundations, the model captures the region's history and identities. LatamGPT is designed to be publicly accessible infrastructure that serves as a foundational engine upon which any government, small-to-medium enterprise (SME), or regional entrepreneur can build specific products, from local translation tools to assistants for municipal procedures, without relying on costly licenses. Finally, LatamGPT employs a data governance framework for the ethical donation and collection of data. This framework ensures that the data is representative of linguistic corpora, guaranteeing the cultural alignment of the models. Thus, regional knowledge is managed under clear privacy and ownership rules (ECLAC, 2025; SEGIB, 2025).

The development of LatamGPT fosters the creation of high-performance, shared infrastructure, establishing AI as a regional digital public good. It is the most significant example in Latin America of how the region can actively participate in shaping the future of AI instead of passively consuming technology. LatamGPT is a significant technological advancement and an excellent example of cooperation.

The Latin American and Caribbean E-Government Leaders Network (GEALC Network) is among the many exemplary initiatives. The Network's primary goal is to promote digital government policies that prioritize citizens, especially the most vulnerable populations. The GEALC Network is a space for horizontal cooperation and the exchange of solutions, where the development of participatory e-government policies is promoted.

To ensure that the development and use of AI is ethical and benefits global society, Latin America and the Global South must promote more active participation in international organizations. Several Latin American countries have the capacity to contribute to global goals but simultaneously face significant challenges, such as inequality and poverty. The characteristics of these countries render the traditional criteria used to define eligibility and

priorities for cooperation, such as income levels and the graduation approach, inadequate. For this reason, South-South Cooperation (SSC) is particularly relevant.

SSC prioritizes horizontal relationships, mutual benefit, and solidarity to promote a more inclusive multilateral system. The SSC facilitates the exchange of practices and solutions tailored to similar local contexts. This approach is more effective and culturally sensitive, enabling accelerated progress in critical areas such as poverty reduction and digital transformation. Consequently, the Global South is positioned as a co-architect of technology with the ability to develop digital infrastructure that addresses local needs while avoiding new forms of dependency.

Currently, AI is exacerbating structural inequalities in the Global South. Governments and institutions in most of these countries have been characterized by opaque actions, and companies pursue their commercial interests and exert excessive political power. Specific problems exist as well, such as those related to biometric identification systems and digital platforms. These systems increase the marginalization of vulnerable groups due to algorithmic biases and a lack of accountability. Notable examples of how contemporary AI dynamics can hinder development include Pakistan's smart surveillance system reinforcing caste or ethnic prejudices and the use of algorithms and "Big Data" in countries such as India, Myanmar, and Somalia contributing to religious hatred and ethnic persecution (Gehl Sampath, 2021).

Similarly, large language models (LLMs) lack representation of local languages and cultural contexts, with estimates indicating that over 90% of the data used to train these models is in English (ITU, 2025/b). Remember that algorithms learn from human-generated data and thus reflect and amplify social biases. This is an ethical issue as well as a technical-operational one because it negatively affects historically excluded linguistic minorities.

Countries in Latin America and the Global South face significant structural barriers that require intentional, concerted action to realize the potential of AI. Significant inequalities exist in the most basic elements necessary for AI use, such as internet access, as well as in the relationship between connectivity and effective AI use and data creation.

Although global internet access has increased in recent years, rising from 16.8% in 2001 to 67% in 2023, significant disparities persist in terms of quality, reliability, and means of connection (UNDP, 2025). This enhances the applicability of AI globally. For instance, only 35% of people in Global South countries have internet access, compared to over 80% in Global North countries. This leaves approximately 3 billion people without access. Inequalities exist not only between the Global North and South, but also between urban and rural areas within the Global South. Seventy-two percent of urban residents use the internet, while only 34% of rural residents have access to it. Additionally, gender disparities are evident; for instance, in Africa, only 24% of women use the internet compared to 35% of men (UNOSSC, 2025).

Another major inequality lies in data. Data from the Global South is often fragmented, outdated, or nonexistent. This leads to algorithmic biases and policy decisions that do not align with the local realities of these regions. The current distribution of digital infrastructure

is also deeply unequal: 77% of the world's data centers are concentrated in OECD countries (Fournier-Tombs et al., 2026). Additionally, a gap exists between connectivity and the effective use of AI due to a lack of digital skills. For example, Costa Rica has 85% connectivity but much lower effective AI usage (ITU, 2025/b).

CCS in AI should promote technology transfer frameworks that prioritize building national and local capacity, enabling countries in the Global South to absorb, adapt, and create new technologies suited to their resources and development potential. We must promote the development and adoption of open-source digital platforms designed specifically for Southern contexts. These platforms should have responsible, equitable, and interoperable data governance. This will help bridge digital divides and ensure that AI development benefits all of humanity fairly. Additionally, it will promote the development of next-generation, interactive, intelligent knowledge platforms designed for co-creating solutions rather than merely serving as passive repositories.

Strategic investment in regional innovation hubs and joint research networks should be encouraged. For instance, India has attracted billions of dollars in investments from companies like Microsoft and Amazon for building IT infrastructure. This has established India as a leader of the Global South and a regional technology and AI hub. The country has a robust innovation ecosystem that prioritizes technological development and can develop scalable solutions. This makes India a key partner for other Global South countries (UNOSSC, 2025). These regional hubs must be led by leading countries in the Global South, such as India and Brazil.

The shared Public Digital Infrastructure (PDI) is of particular importance. It provides equitable access to computing capacity and research resources on a regional and global basis. The PDI features global repositories and interoperable systems that serve as global knowledge bases. These systems improve access through trusted hubs that guarantee quality and security. Governments can collaborate through the PDI to develop high-speed networks and data centers. These centers enable the seamless exchange of information and the use of AI models across various sectors (UNCTAD, 2025).

Small language models (SLMs) are recommended for countries in the Global South because they are designed for specific use cases. SLMs provide cost-effective, targeted, and secure solutions. This approach enhances data privacy, reduces latency, and ensures continuous operation in areas with unstable internet access because it can be implemented using mobile devices (UNDP, 2025). However, one must also consider the potential inequalities arising from ethnic and religious factors, as well as the ethical considerations related to privacy, security, and responsible use.

AI can contribute to financial inclusion by addressing identity issues and the lack of traditional data. AI allows financial institutions to provide services to vulnerable populations without a formal credit history by analyzing their digital footprint. In Kenya, for example, the M-Shwari system uses these capabilities to assess risk and determine loan amounts through the M-Pesa platform. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, startups such as CreditVidya, ZestFinance, and Lenddo are using AI-enhanced solutions to provide financial services to

previously excluded sectors. AI forms the foundation of new identification systems in the realm of biometrics and digital identity that enable access to financial services without the need for traditional physical documents. Applications like Humaniq use algorithms to create user profiles based on biometric data in seconds. This makes it easier for people without passports or email accounts to join the banking system. In India, for example, the Aadhaar program uses biometrics to enable more than a billion people to digitally authenticate themselves and access financial services (UNOSSC, 2018).

However, it should be noted that if the training data is not representative of the population's diversity, algorithms can perpetuate social biases. Additionally, personal data can be used for intrusive surveillance by governments and corporations.

Thus, there are many successful examples of AI applications, cooperation, and policy throughout the Global South in various fields. For example, in 2011, Chile and South Korea implemented an e-government training program aimed at Latin American and Caribbean countries. The program aimed to strengthen digital citizenship capabilities by training consultants to design citizen portals, digital signatures, and online service management systems. This initiative established a regional network of digital government experts focused on citizen-oriented services (SEGIB, 2025). In Africa, the MamaMate AI device operates offline and is powered by solar energy or USB. It communicates in native languages and focuses on equity and accessibility. The device is intended for the millions of women who lack postnatal education, one in five of whom experiences postnatal depression (ITU, 2025/b). In India, AI-powered tools can accurately diagnose conditions such as malaria, diabetes, kidney disease, and tuberculosis. This enables early intervention in communities with limited resources (ITU, 2025/b). In Kenya, the AgriTech company Ujuzikilimo uses big data analytics to transform farms into knowledge communities, optimize irrigation and fertilization, and improve productivity (UNOSSC, 2018).

Finally, development banks in the Global South, such as the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the African Development Bank (AfDB), and CAF—the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean—must play a significant role in technological transformation and the utilization of AI for development. These banks have transformed the landscape of development finance by positioning themselves as critical actors that offer alternatives to and complement traditional financial institutions. They seek to close the financing gap in the Global South, foster South-South cooperation, and support regional integration. SSC uses financial instruments that are more contextually relevant and innovative blended financing models. It is also more accessible than conventional multilateral and bilateral banking. Furthermore, these banks are not merely channels for money; they also serve as instruments of political and economic agency. They aim to contribute to greater agency capacity in global governance by providing a platform for greater autonomy in technological production.

Cooperation on AI also aligns well with the triangular cooperation (TC) approach. While Official Development Assistance (ODA) has focused almost exclusively on financial support, TC pays special attention to contributions of knowledge and capacity. The exchange of

experiences and best practices in AI is a powerful application of TC's multi-stakeholder approach, which includes governments, universities, and startups. TC can also raise awareness through mini- and multilateral dialogues on the role of global digital public goods, such as digitization and connectivity infrastructure development. According to SEGIB (2023), Latin America is particularly active in this form of cooperation, making it the world's most dynamic region in this type of cooperation.

The European Union is an attractive partner for Latin America in the context of the CT because it promotes ethical standards, open-source software, and digital rights. The Global Gateway, the EU's most ambitious strategic framework for international cooperation, offers a transparent, ethical, and sustainable alternative by integrating policies on cooperation, technological development, and economic diplomacy. The EU–LAC Digital Alliance is a political and technical platform dedicated to relations with Latin America. It focuses specifically on technology governance, digital inclusion, and AI. It has an initial budget of €172 million. This budget will facilitate the development of high-impact projects that are grounded in democratic values and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. The budget also enables the region to actively participate in designing, regulating, and contextualizing the adoption of these projects. Important initiatives advanced by these two regions include the Ibero-American Charter of Digital Rights, the horizontal co-design ADELANTE program, the EllaLink transatlantic submarine cable connecting Portugal and Brazil, and the cross-cutting 4D4 hub platform connecting stakeholders, aligning agendas, and facilitating regulatory convergence between regions (SEGIB, 2025).

Within the European Union, cooperation with Spain and Portugal is particularly significant for Latin America due to linguistic and cultural affinities, as well as these countries' computing capabilities. With the Spanish-Portuguese MareNostrum 5 supercomputer, their computing capabilities exceed 314 petaflops. One potential area for cooperation is the ALIA project; a public AI infrastructure developed in Spanish with auditability and transparency standards. This project provides Latin American countries with access to a robust, adaptable system. Institutionally, the RISC (Ibero-American Supercomputing Network) can be strengthened to facilitate resource and technical expertise sharing between the two regions (Martorell and Porrúa, 2026).

These institutional and operational elements allow implemented projects to address local priorities, align with data protection, AI ethics, and sustainability regulations, and create the conditions for long-term, horizontal digital cooperation.

In line with these principles, initiatives by organizations such as the OECD stand out. The OECD (2025/b) has proposed a Trustworthy AI in Government framework composed of three pillars: enablers, safeguards, and commitment. The enablers are the operational elements necessary for AI to function effectively and securely within the administration. This includes clear leadership from the highest levels of government to build trust and mobilize resources; a mission-oriented approach, in which AI is used to solve specific challenges; and multi-level coordination to avoid duplication and inconsistencies. Safeguards ensure that AI is deployed within ethical and legal boundaries. Supreme Audit Institutions can conduct

technical audits of algorithms to verify their impartiality and security. Finally, commitment emphasizes participatory governance to gain legitimacy and ensure that AI responds to the real needs of the population. Citizen participation through citizens' assemblies and deliberative processes can define the uses of AI.

One of the most promising cooperation initiatives is the OECD AI Policy Observatory (OECD.AI), which allows countries to monitor, compare, and analyze AI policies worldwide, thereby facilitating the exchange of evidence (OECD, 2025/b). This repository of best practices exemplifies a best practice in CT.

Organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and UNICEF have launched initiatives like Giga, which has a significant impact. Giga uses AI to address the infrastructure challenge posed by the fact that nearly half of the world's schools lack internet connectivity. Since 2019, Giga has used AI and open geospatial data to map 2.2 million schools in 143 countries, identifying large-scale infrastructure gaps and providing greater access to connectivity for more than 11 million students. Thanks to its open-source solutions, it aims to provide connectivity for more than 11 million students by 2025. The AI Skills Coalition is another ITU initiative. As a coalition functioning as a global platform to democratize access to AI education, the coalition promotes AI literacy and the ethical and sustainable use of AI for development and governance. It targets students in developing and least developed countries and brings together more than 25 academic, industry, and government organizations (ITU, 2025b). Latin American governments should sign agreements with these institutions to share data, coordinate with their ministries, integrate local data into global platforms, and create spaces where AI educational tools can be tested.

The ITU, FAO, and WFP launched the Global Initiative on AI for Food Systems in 2025. This initiative seeks to establish shared digital infrastructure and standards that support inclusive innovation, particularly for smallholder farmers. They represent 84% of the 540 million farms worldwide (ITU, 2025/b). This initiative is particularly significant for achieving some of humanity's most pressing ethical goals, such as reducing poverty. This is because a significant proportion of the global population living in poverty and vulnerability is engaged in agriculture.

Programs such as NAIRR in the United States and AIRR in the United Kingdom should also be highlighted. These programs aim to provide equitable access to researchers and academics, ensuring that they do not rely exclusively on private infrastructure. Switzerland's CERN AI initiative, on the other hand, seeks to create a decentralized international network that combines computing power, data, and talent for high-impact projects in health and climate. Switzerland is also developing a model trained on datasets spanning over a thousand languages, with a specific focus on underrepresented languages, to make it useful for global health and science applications (ITU, 2025/a). It is important to note here that, in technology cooperation co-financed by Northern and Southern countries, local perspectives must be at the center of debates on AI safety and digital ethics.

Thus, the various forms of international cooperation demonstrate a wide array of successful practices and policies that ensure AI contributes to humanity's highest goals.

Conclusions

Throughout human history, critical technological junctures have significantly shaped economic, social, and political structures. The most recent of these was the Industrial Revolution. In the contemporary era, the development of artificial intelligence (AI) is another major technological advancement that is influencing all spheres of life as a general-purpose technology. AI is a technological breakthrough that is reshaping the political and economic landscapes worldwide. We are at a turning point in our time, in the era of AI.

However, these junctures also define the global political economy, where the benefits of technological advances may reach only a small portion of humanity, or not at all. Latin America is falling behind in AI development, repeating patterns of technological dependence and deepening inequality. However, Latin America has the opportunity to reverse this trend and promote greater well-being for its population.

Each state in the region has a responsibility to ensure the ethical and inclusive development of AI, as well as to foster conditions that enable this technology to contribute effectively to social well-being. Because AI governance involves various actors, such as governments of world powers and large technology companies, only states have the capacity to shape and regulate these dynamics. Only states with democratic regimes will aim to steer these advancements toward social well-being. Efforts by civil society to achieve more transparent and democratic AI governance will also contribute to the democratization of political systems.

This broad policy agenda demonstrates how AI can promote social welfare in Latin America, spanning open government initiatives and sector-specific policies in vital areas such as health, nutrition, and education. However, several caveats exist: algorithmic biases, the concentration of technological power, new forms of digital dependency, and issues of cultural and linguistic diversity within the digital ecosystem. Therefore, whether the proposed objectives are achieved depends on the policies and practices that countries implement.

Within these dynamics, a virtuous – or vicious – cycle emerges where stronger state capacities enable better AI development and adaptation, which in turn further strengthens those capacities. Therefore, international cooperation is essential to prevent a spiral of inequalities.

To this end, a set of policies and actions was proposed to foster an ecosystem of regional, South-South, and triangular cooperation. Unlike the productive factors of the Industrial Revolution, AI is inherently cooperative. International cooperation on AI uniquely aligns with this new paradigm, recognizing that development is an ongoing process in which all countries face shared challenges and acknowledging the advantages of multidimensional approaches. Only global governance of AI that adheres to technical and operational standards within ethical frameworks based on democratic values can ensure that the benefits of AI reach all of humanity.

Therefore, the future of Latin America and humanity depends on our ability to transform AI into a public good and a tool for social justice.

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