

DEMOCRACY, PEACE AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) CHALLENGE: HOW YOUNG MALAYSIANS PERCEIVE GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL STABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia faces both opportunities and challenges in the digital era, as it navigates the intersection of democracy, peace, and artificial intelligence (AI). As AI continues to transform governance, the economy, and public debate, its consequences for democratic institutions and societal harmony must be carefully considered. While AI-powered innovations can enhance transparency, electoral integrity, and public service delivery, they also raise concerns, including the spread of misinformation, algorithmic bias, and threats to civil liberties. This article examines how young Malaysians perceive AI to enhance democratic governance while mitigating risks to social cohesion and political stability. Malaysia can navigate the AI revolution while maintaining peace and democratic integrity by promoting an ethical AI policy, enhancing digital literacy, and ensuring a regulatory framework that aligns with democratic values. This study employs a quantitative method, utilizing self-developed questions and instruments. The sample consisted of 386 students from public and private universities. The data was analysed statistically. The report emphasizes the need for multi-stakeholder engagement among the government, commercial sector, and civil society to develop a resilient and technologically inclusive future.

Keywords: democracy; democratic peace theory; and AI.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has introduced transformative dynamics to democratic governance and societal structures. While AI technologies promise enhanced efficiency, data-driven decision-making, and improved public service delivery, they also present complex and multifaceted challenges. These include ethical dilemmas in algorithmic design, threats to civil liberties through surveillance and data misuse, and challenges to political stability through misinformation and the deepening of digital divides.

Malaysia, as a pluralistic and evolving democratic state, faces unique challenges in reconciling the rapid adoption of technology with the preservation of peace and democratic norms. The problem is compounded by the fact that digital literacy among the population, particularly among youth, remains uneven, and national AI policies may not fully reflect ethical and democratic considerations. Concerns regarding algorithmic bias, lack of transparency in governance, and inadequate regulatory oversight raise significant questions about the readiness of Malaysia's democratic institutions to face AI-driven disruptions.

Therefore, this paper focuses on a critical problem: How do Malaysian youth, who will be the drivers of future governance, perceive the implications of AI for democracy and political stability? Their perceptions are vital because they reflect both the opportunities for civic engagement and the potential fractures in digital trust and institutional legitimacy.

This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do Malaysian university students perceive the role of AI in democratic governance and public service delivery?
2. What are their concerns regarding AI's impact on civil liberties, misinformation, and political stability?
3. How does digital literacy correlate with trust in democratic institutions in the context of AI?

Through a quantitative approach, this study aims to contribute to the discourse on technological governance by providing empirical evidence from a youth-centric perspective. It emphasizes the urgency for multi-stakeholder collaboration in ensuring that AI development aligns with democratic values and promotes long-term societal harmony.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 AI and Democratic Governance: Global Perspectives

Globally, AI's transformative role in democratic institutions has sparked increasing academic scrutiny and policy debate. Coeckelbergh (2024) critiques the "democratic deficit" inherent in AI governance, arguing that the opacity of algorithmic decision-making undermines accountability, transparency, and participatory oversight—cornerstones of democratic systems. Such mechanisms often escape public scrutiny due to their complexity and proprietary design, leading to a technocratic mode of governance where decisions are delegated to systems that citizens do not fully understand or control.

Mentxaka et al., (2025) provide a comprehensive dual taxonomy on AI and democracy, categorizing AI's democratic interactions into two domains: participatory enhancement and autonomy suppression. On one hand, AI tools such as recommendation algorithms, innovative platforms, and digital participatory mechanisms can expand civic engagement, streamline government-citizen communication, and personalize public services. On the other hand, these same tools may limit individual autonomy by subtly shaping political preferences, prioritizing efficiency over deliberation, and amplifying echo chambers that threaten pluralistic debate.

More critically, scholars such as (Ananny & Crawford, 2018) and Binns et al., (2018) argue that even well-intentioned AI systems may inadvertently reproduce systemic biases or democratic exclusions if not guided by normative frameworks. Furthermore, AI-driven surveillance and data analytics can shift power asymmetries, increasing state and corporate dominance over citizen agency. Thus, while digital innovations promise democratic efficiencies, they simultaneously introduce risks to institutional legitimacy, electoral integrity, and social cohesion. For Malaysia, these global insights carry direct implications, particularly as AI becomes more integrated into governance frameworks without clear civic safeguards or mechanisms for contestation.

2.2 Algorithmic Bias and Civil Liberties

The rise of algorithmic decision-making in public administration and policy introduces profound risks of systemic bias and democratic erosion. Barthwal et al., (2025) argue that bias in AI systems is not accidental but rather emerges from the datasets on which they are trained,

which often reflect entrenched social, economic, and racial inequalities. These datasets encode historical injustices and structural marginalization, which AI systems then replicate at scale, often without accountability or visibility.

(Lim et al., 2021) emphasize that the absence of inclusive and participatory digital governance frameworks exacerbates these challenges. In societies marked by ethnic and cultural diversity, such as Malaysia, the implications are particularly severe. Algorithmic tools used in public services, law enforcement, or electoral processes may inadvertently privilege dominant groups while excluding minorities, leading to disenfranchisement and distrust in institutions.

Moreover, biased algorithms can perpetuate cycles of social inequality by misclassifying individuals for welfare eligibility, job recruitment, or creditworthiness, as seen in numerous international case studies. These outcomes are not only technical failures but ethical breaches that demand urgent redress. Hence, scholars are increasingly calling for comprehensive ethical frameworks that ensure fairness, transparency, and inclusivity in the deployment of AI. These frameworks must extend beyond technical solutions to encompass legal safeguards, institutional oversight, and mechanisms for citizen redress, particularly in democratic societies that seek to uphold pluralism and social cohesion, such as Malaysia.

2.3 AI and Political Stability in Asia

In Asia, the intersection between AI and political stability has become an increasingly focal point of research, owing to the region's diverse governance models and rapid technological adoption.) Fontes et al., (2022); and Kao & Sapp, (2022) explore how AI-fuelled surveillance infrastructures in authoritarian regimes have contributed to enhanced governmental control and social order. However, these developments simultaneously raise concerns about erosion of civil liberties, surveillance overreach, and a chilling effect on political dissent.

Democracies in Asia face a different, though no less complex, dilemma: how to encourage AI innovation while safeguarding democratic values such as transparency, accountability, and pluralism. Shouli et al., (2025) emphasize the importance of inclusive policymaking that involves youth, civil society, and marginalized communities. They emphasize digital literacy and civic education as foundational elements to counterbalance the concentration of algorithmic power and ensure AI is used to empower rather than exclude.

In Malaysia, the tension between AI adoption and democratic resilience is evident in both state rhetoric and policy actions. Khin & Mustafar, (2024) observe that Malaysia adopts a cautious, pragmatic approach, prioritizing service innovation, institutional agility, and economic competitiveness. However, this careful embrace does not fully address the democratic implications of AI technologies, such as their use in policing, predictive analytics in immigration control, or algorithmic filtering in state-run media. The absence of a comprehensive rights-based AI governance framework leaves open the possibility of democratic erosion in the name of digital progress. Therefore, Malaysia represents both a cautionary tale and a potential model for navigating the AI-democracy nexus in transitional societies.

2.4 Malaysia's AI Ecosystem and Policy Framework

Malaysia's national AI strategy reflects aspirations to become a regional leader in digital transformation. The establishment of the National AI Roadmap (2021) and the recent creation of a National AI Office (Hassan, 2024) signal the state's commitment to structured AI development. Haneem et al. (2023) reveal how data visualization tools empower decision-

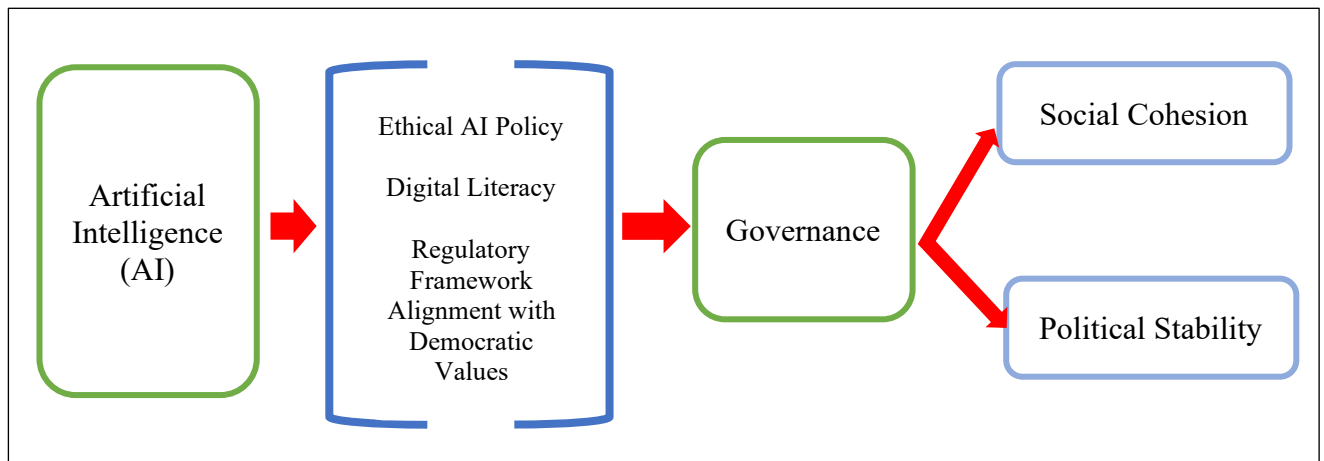
makers in Malaysia's public sector. Yet, scholars such as (Kao & Sapp, 2022; Weber, 2024) emphasize that inclusive and ethical AI governance remains a gap.

2.5 Youth Perceptions and Digital Governance

Youth, as digital natives, are central to the discourse on AI and democracy. Empirical research by shows that youth are both optimistic and cautious about AI's role in public affairs. Digital literacy, trust in institutions, and exposure to civic education strongly influence their attitudes. In the Malaysian context, studies by Haneem et al., (2023); Kao & Sapp,(2022); Khin & Mustafar, (2024); Lim et al., (2021); Weber, (2024) demonstrate that young people demand transparency, fairness, and accountability in digital governance. 2.6 AI, Misinformation, and Civic Engagement.

One of the most critical concerns raised by scholars is the role of AI in spreading misinformation. As pointed out by Berenzen, (2023) AI-generated content such as deepfakes can mislead voters and erode trust in democratic institutions. Countermeasures, including AI literacy and robust media regulation, are essential. The findings by (Shouli et al., 2025) reinforce the need to incorporate youth voices into the development of AI strategies to promote civic participation.

To illustrate the study framework, below is the model of the study.



3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative survey method to explore the perceptions of Malaysian youth regarding the impact of AI on democracy and political stability. A self-developed online questionnaire was distributed among undergraduate students in both public and private universities. The instrument underwent face validity testing with academic experts and was piloted with 30 students to assess reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.87).

A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure demographic representation based on institution type, gender, and field of study. The final sample consisted of 386 respondents. Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 28, involving descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression to explore predictors of democratic trust and perceived stability.

Below is the data for the respondents based on gender and institutional type.

Table 1 Gender of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	155	40.2
	Female	231	59.8
	Total	386	100.0

Data above showed the numbers of respondents that responds to the survey. There are 155 male respondents and 231 are females. Perhaps, it corresponds to the reality of the gender demographics among universities students in Malaysia. Only valid responds were presented in this studies.

Table 2 Type of Respondents University

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Local University	260	67.4
	Private University	126	32.6
	Total	386	100.0

While the data above shows the type of university that the respondents belongs to. It can be understands that 67% of the respondents are the public university students, which corresponds the national data of higher students composition. Another 32 % were private institutions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the research questions, data was then analyzed according to the study framework.

1. How do Malaysian university students perceive the role of AI in democratic governance and public service delivery?
2. How does digital literacy correlate with trust in democratic institutions in the context of AI?
3. What are their concerns regarding AI's impact on civil liberties, misinformation, and political stability?

Based on the below results, in answering research question number 1, which investigating the students perception on the role of AI in democratic governance and public service delivery, it can be understands that students perceived that AI should be designed to prevent discrimination and bias (RQ1A) with highest means score with 3.855 compared to the lowest mean score of the understanding on transparency in AI making decisions item of RQ1B with 2.179. Overall mean score of all 9 items was 3.073 which can be understand that respondents do have positive perceptions on the ethical AI policy in democratic governance and public services delivery.

Table 3 Students Perceive The Role Of AI In Democratic Governance And Public Service Delivery

	Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
RQ1A	386	2.0	5.0	3.855	.7591
RQ1B	386	1.0	5.0	2.179	.8101
RQ1C	386	1.0	5.0	2.218	.8276
RQ1D	386	1.0	5.0	2.241	.7872
RQ1E	386	2.0	5.0	3.793	.7753
RQ1F	386	2.0	5.0	3.821	.7774
RQ1G	386	1.0	5.0	3.427	.8686
RQ1H	386	1.0	5.0	3.536	.8768
RQ1I	386	1.0	5.0	2.588	.8520
Valid N (listwise)	386				

In terms of reliability of the all these 9 items, the Cronbach's Alpha value was .071 which means items are reliable for the measurement of students perception on AI role in democratic and public services delivery.

While answering the questions of digital literacy correlate with trust in democratic institutions in the context of AI, final item was reduced to only 4 items. Cronbach's Alpha reached .081 that marked the items is reliable to be reported.

Table 4 Cronbach's Alpha Value for Digital Literacy Correlates with Democratic Practices

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.081	4

Table 5 Digital Literacy Correlates with Democratic Practices

	Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
RQ2A	386	2.0	5.0	3.821	.7774
RQ2B	386	1.0	5.0	2.557	.8577
RQ2C	386	1.0	5.0	3.552	.8459
RQ2D	386	1.0	5.0	3.503	.8536
Valid N (listwise)	386				

The average mean score for research question number 2 was 3.358 for 4 items measured. The highest mean score was 3.821 that corresponds to the preparation to adapt technological changes, followed by AI deployment in election must be transparent with mean score 3.552, protection of AI from government abuse must be seriously considered with mean score of

3.503, and public should involve in AI policy decision of 2.557 mean score. Therefore, it can be conclude that AI do have a correlation in democratic institution and process.

On the concerns regarding AI's impact on civil liberties, misinformation, and political stability, only 7 items was reported, while other was deleted due to validity and reliability issues. The Cronbach's Alpha value was .074 which marked that the items meet minimum requirement for the item treat as valid. Below is the result of validity test using SPSS.

Table 5 Impact of Civil Liberties

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.074	7

Table 6 Mean Score for Impact of Civil Liberties

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
RQ3A	386	1.0	5.0	2.161	.7896
RQ3B	386	1.0	5.0	3.935	.8396
RQ3C	386	2.0	5.0	3.904	.7853
RQ3D	386	2.0	5.0	3.990	.8025
RQ3E	386	2.0	5.0	3.907	.8069
RQ3F	386	1.0	5.0	2.588	.8520
RQ3G	386	1.0	5.0	3.552	.8459
Valid N (listwise)	386				

The average mean score for research question number 3 was 3.434 for 7 items measured. The highest mean score was 3.990 that corresponds to data protection. While the lowest score was recorded on the understanding on how AI manipulates online behaviour on civil liberties. It means that respondent are concerns with how AI impact their civil liberties, misinformation and contribute to government stability.

Descriptive statistics show that 68.7% of respondents were aware of AI applications in governance. Of these, 65% believed that AI could improve electoral transparency and service delivery. However, 58% expressed concerns about data privacy, while 49% worried about algorithmic bias.

Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship ($r = 0.42$, $p < .01$) between digital literacy and trust in democratic institutions. Regression analysis identified three key predictors of perceived political stability: AI literacy ($\beta = 0.33$), institutional trust ($\beta = 0.29$), and perceived transparency of AI applications ($\beta = 0.27$). These findings suggest that informed and digitally literate youth are more optimistic about the role of AI in sustaining democracy.

The discussion aligns with the global literature, which emphasizes the need for inclusive AI governance (Coeckelbergh, 2024; Mentxaka et al., 2025) Malaysian youth reflect both promise

and peril: they are open to AI's benefits but demand accountability. Such duality mirrors findings by (Kao & Sapp, (2022); Lim et al., (2021); Mentxaka et al., (2025); Pinto, (2018); Ting et al., (2024); Weber, (2024); Wok & Mohamed, (2017).

5. CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the perspectives of Malaysian youth regarding artificial intelligence (AI) and governance. The data suggest that while youth are optimistic about the potential of AI in enhancing democracy, they remain cautious about its implications for civil liberties and social cohesion. Policymakers must address these concerns by fostering ethical AI frameworks, investing in digital education, and promoting multi-stakeholder dialogue.

As Malaysia navigates its digital future, it must prioritize democratic integrity and societal peace. Engaging youth in AI policy discussions and ensuring that technological advancements align with democratic values are key to building a resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking nation.

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