

24th Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Written Statement by the Development Academy of the Philippines - Graduate School of Public and Development Management

Agenda 6: Role of Governments in Ensuring Transparency and Accountability of Artificial Intelligence Systems in Public Administration

The public sector is on the cusp of mathematically systematizing assessment of artificial intelligence (AI) in streamlining government processes. The rapid transformation of AI systems offers unprecedented capabilities, but attached to this technological shift is the introduction of complex challenges relative to privacy, accountability, bias, and transparency. Maintaining human oversight and control is imperative in ensuring that human agency and ethics remain central to these processes (Sy, 2023). The United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration underscores the importance of effective governance in fostering accountable institutions, particularly in relation to AI's role in achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which aims to promote just, inclusive, and transparent governance. In light of this, governments worldwide must implement comprehensive AI governance strategies that balance innovation with the need for public oversight (Martin, 2023).

The unique position of governments as both regulators and adopters of AI technologies creates both opportunities and responsibilities. As deployers of AI systems that directly impact citizens' lives, governments have an elevated obligation to ensure these technologies operate in transparent, accountable, and equitable ways that serve the public interest and protect fundamental rights. In response to AI's ethical and societal implications, several countries have integrated AI governance into their national strategies. Canada was among the first to implement a structured approach through its Pan-Canadian AI Strategy in 2017, while the United Kingdom followed in 2018 with the establishment of the Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation, aimed at ensuring responsible AI development. At present, numerous states have taken steps to assess and mitigate AI-related risks while capitalizing on its benefits (Butcher & Beridze, 2019).

The rapid growth and advancement of AI in the Philippines has also sparked growing concerns, transforming it from an interesting tech toy into a matter of serious legislative deliberation. Several AI-related bills are currently under consideration in the 19th Session of the House of Representatives, including House Bills 7913 and 7983, introduced by Representative Keith Micah Tan; House Bill 7396, sponsored by Representative Robert Ace Barbers; and House

Bill 9448, proposed by Representative Juan Carlos Atayde. A common challenge in AI policymaking is the difficulty in establishing precise definitions, as many legislative proposals either lack clarity or encompass overly broad interpretations of AI. This issue is not solely attributable to lawmakers but is also influenced by the evolving nature of AI research and the exaggerated claims made by the industry, which have contributed to inconsistencies in both academic literature and legislative drafting (UP College of Law, 2024).

Transparency and accountability in AI governance necessitate robust institutional oversight. The Philippines has taken steps in laying the groundwork for AI governance through initiatives such as the Joint Memorandum Circular between the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) and the Civil Service Commission (CSC) on ethical AI use in government, the goal of which is to establish regulations on AI use within the government (Policy Research and Analysis Division, 2024). With support from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) has also launched its National AI Strategy Roadmap (NAISR) 2.0 and the Center for AI Research (CAIR) which aims to utilize AI as a tool to improve both the Philippine economy and the living conditions of the Filipino citizens (DTI, 2024).

For a functioning democratic society, transparency in AI-powered policies and decisions is foundational. When non-technical stakeholders can understand how AI systems function, this creates an environment conducive to truthful and informed decision-making processes within governance structures. In Singapore, they have instituted as a prerequisite that AI decisions and associated data are translated in non-technical terms to promote informed public debate and legitimacy to end-users and other stakeholders (Personal Data Protection Commission Singapore, 2020). In Jobin *et al.* (2019), it was shown that the common denominator of most ethics or organizational guidelines about the use of Artificial Intelligence underscores the element of accountability.

In developing the Philippine framework for AI governance, the Philippines gears toward its various initiatives in boosting its economy to be more innovative, resilient, and inclusive (Castro, 2022). However, while stakeholders express concern about premature regulation of AI systems, the global conversation has evolved from questioning if regulation should occur to determining optimal implementation approaches. Despite regulatory initiatives emerging in regions like the European Union and United Kingdom, Sy emphasizes that "governance is much broader than *government regulation* or government itself," suggesting a more comprehensive approach that accounts for AI's economic, political, and socio-cultural impacts on Philippine society (Sy, 2023).

According to Loi & Spielkamp (2021), accountability in AI-driven governance is complicated by distributed responsibility, induced acceptance, and acceptance through ignorance. When AI is integrated into public administration, responsibility can become fragmented, making it difficult to determine who is accountable for decisions, particularly when officials rely on automated systems without fully understanding their limitations. Additionally, if AI-driven processes are widely accepted without scrutiny, citizens may unknowingly relinquish their ability to challenge automated decisions, further eroding democratic oversight. The Philippine government must adopt regulations that require AI developers to provide explanations for automated decisions, particularly in high-stakes applications such as social welfare distribution and law enforcement (Doshi-Velez et al., 2018). Independent oversight bodies, such as the National Privacy Commission (NPC), should be empowered to audit AI systems and investigate potential ethical violations (Loi & Spielkamp, 2021).

For the Philippines to succeed in this domain, governance mechanisms must require transparent explanations for automated decisions, particularly in critical areas affecting citizen welfare, while empowering oversight bodies to conduct meaningful audits of AI systems. By adopting this balanced approach—one that acknowledges both AI's transformative potential and its inherent risks—the Philippines can develop governance frameworks that not only protect citizens but also position the nation as an innovative participant in the global digital economy while ensuring these systems remain accountable and aligned with broader societal goals.

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