

Power in the Age of Integration: From Human to Algorithms

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Abstract

In light of the transformation we are experiencing, by entering the digital age, and the immediate impact that artificial intelligence (AI) has had on all aspects of political, social, and economic life—along with the anticipated future effects—radical transformations are expected to reshape traditional concepts of authority and political systems. As we move further into the digital era, the very notion of power is bound to change organically. Authority is no longer confined to political systems, classical leadership figures, or even large parties with strong ideological foundations. Power is no longer exercised through known traditional method. In the digital age, it has become exercised using new methods that humanity has never seen before.

The objectives of this study are as follows, to analyze how the relationship between citizens and authority is transformed in a world governed by algorithms.

To address the problem posed, we have relied on the historical method to review selected theories proposed by various philosophers and legal scholars; the analytical method to examine certain phenomena as influenced by the advent of artificial intelligence; and the comparative method to contrast the physical (real) world with the digital one. In conclusions, the social contract is entering a new stage linked to digital rights. In recommendations, Ensure the democratic use of artificial intelligence and prevent a slide into digital authoritarianism by establishing mechanisms that safeguard rights and freedoms.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Digital Social Contract, Human Rights, Political Authority, Liquid Democracy*

1. Introduction:

The relationship between politics and power is deeply problematic and philosophical in nature, depending on each existing political system. Under the Internet, it will become a deep, virtual, and ambiguous relationship. Power symbolizes authority, while control has become embedded in our socio-electronic life, presenting profound challenges to democratic systems. We live in a “post-human” era, in which power has shifted from merely seizing control to flowing like an unseen web through the social, economic, and political details of daily life. This shift has brought political theory into the virtual world—into what we might call “post-humanity.”

One major reason democracy’s meaning is harder to grasp today is that it evolved over thousands of years from varied roots. The meaning of democracy today differs greatly from what it meant to the citizens of Athens under Pericles. Greek, Roman, medieval, Renaissance, and later ideas have blended in uneven, often discordant ways—mixing theory with practice in a way that often lacks consistency (Dahl, 2005, p. 13).

Power struggles in small groups occur among individuals, where power is weakly organized in early forms of distinction between “rulers” and “ruled,” or between leaders and members. In larger societies, political conflict involves social factions, intermediary groups within the broader community, as well as individuals. Power in large groups is rigorously structured in hierarchical levels. Some sociologists limit politics to analyzing those complexities in large groups, neglecting the study of leadership in smaller ones. But these two phenomena are tightly linked and cannot be properly understood in isolation. In legislatures, administrative committees, party leadership councils, and other levels in large group governance, small subgroups wield political power. Thus, we must distinguish micro-political analysis, on the level of interpersonal relations, from macro-political analysis, which concerns large collectivities where personal connection is replaced by mediated relations (via patronage, bureaucratic mechanisms, or staged rituals such as formal proclamations or televised addresses). Transitions between these levels raise significant theoretical questions (Duverger, p. 8).

Desire for possession, too, is natural. Those who succeed in it are praised; those who cannot may do whatever it takes, sometimes making missteps that draw much criticism (Machiavelli, p. 30).

Jean Bodin explored a traditional model aligned with sovereignty by linking authority to the family structure, which he considered the genuine paradigm of republican order (Bodin, 1955, p. 69).

The second major transformation both contracted democracy’s boundaries and expanded them. Once political community grew large in nation-states, direct participation by all citizens became impracticable. Representation had to replace direct legislative discussion and voting that citizens in ancient city-states engaged in—even though in some places local units still offer more direct participation. Although democratic opportunity diminished in one dimension, it expanded in another: the theory of representation crossed many theoretical limits, allowing the rule of law and unified legal legitimacy to cover entire nations—something inconceivable under the city-state model (Dahl, 2005, p. 528).

Artificial intelligence is poised to reshape the traditional notion of power, which has long depended on democratic participation by citizens. In its place may emerge spider-web

political systems in which decisions are driven by algorithms. “That is to say that when thinking about the power of the algorithm, we need to think not just about the impact and consequences of code, we also need to think about the powerful ways in which notions and ideas about the algorithm circulate through the social world. Within these notions of the algorithm, we are likely to find broader rationalities, knowledge-making and norms— with the concept of the algorithm holding powerful and convincing sway in how things are done or how they should be done”(David, 2017, p. 2).

This transformation will affect classical democracy, potentially turning it into a form of “liquid democracy”. “Uncertainty about the algorithm could lead us to mis judge their power, to overemphasise their importance, to misconceive of the algorithm as a lone detached actor, or to miss how power might actually be deployed through such technologies”(David, 2017, p.3). In this context, micro-political interactions among citizens and macro-political structures—state, political parties, pressure groups, trade unions—may converge under what can be called algorithmic power.

We pose the following problem: To what extent is artificial intelligence capable of reshaping authority in an integrated world? And what is the fate of the traditional theory of the social contract?

The significance of this research lies in its engagement with a revolution we are currently experiencing—one whose broad title is Artificial Intelligence. This revolution is expected to bring about profound transformations in all aspects of human life, including authority, the social contract, and fundamental rights and freedoms, all under the influence of algorithmic systems.

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine traditional authority from a philosophical perspective.
2. To explore the mechanisms by which AI affects the political and legal spheres.
3. To analyze how the relationship between citizens and authority is transformed in a world governed by algorithms.

To address the problem posed, we have relied on the historical method to review selected theories proposed by various philosophers and legal scholars; the analytical method to examine certain phenomena as influenced by the advent of artificial intelligence; and the comparative method to contrast the physical (real) world with the digital one.

2. Transformations of Power between Theory and Reality: From Democratic Ambitions to the Challenges of the Digital Social Contract

Politics, which in the time of the greatest ancient philosophers was practiced in the city-states of Greece, has now shifted into a virtual realm intertwined with physical reality. Within this hybrid space, human intelligence-based decisions are increasingly merged with those made by artificial intelligence—particularly as AI can process and analyze massive amounts of data.

Just as the Industrial Revolution was, the revolution related to artificial intelligence will move humanity from one stage to another, so that this will affect the nature and quality of relations between countries and between humans. We may be entering a post-human era, and within this phase, classical democracy could evolve into what might be called liquid democracy, driven by the presence of super intelligent AI. This shift will undoubtedly affect the existing social contract in any political system and, by extension, impact individual rights

and freedoms. As a result, rights and freedoms may be reclassified in new ways, beyond the classical categorization currently known.

Over history, the concept of power has undergone fundamental shifts—both in its philosophical foundations and in how it is exercised in societies. These transformations have always been tied to changing political, economic, and technological contexts. From divine or hereditary absolute authority to democracy grounded in popular representation and the separation of powers, major ideas like the “social contract” have served as reference frameworks for reorganizing the relationship between state and citizen and for limiting power in favor of freedom and justice. As Plato asked in *The Republic*: “Should we allow the person who does not know truth to steer the ship?” (Book VI, the Ship-of-State metaphor).

What was presented in *The Republic* via the ship metaphor was part of a philosophical discussion about the ideal ruler—someone who must possess wisdom to discover truth deeply. In this metaphor, the “ship” symbolizes the state. To lead the ship is to require a wise captain who understands the path the state must follow and who can articulate goals that serve shared interests.

Today, we revisit this deep metaphor in the presence of algorithms and artificial intelligence—tools based on data and analytic computation, unlike deep human thought—which create laws and make decisions that affect citizens’ rights and freedoms across the political, social, and economic spectrum. If we place algorithms instead of a human captain at the helm of the ship, we grant them control over society’s future and its political course. Thus, one could claim that the “Ship of the Future” will be navigated by an algorithmic captain. Throughout history, humans have struggled and revolted over who should lead that ship. “one key problem with attempting to explore the social power of algorithms is in how we approach those algorithms in the first place. Should we treat them as lines of code, as objects, or should we see them as social processes in which the social world is embodied in the substrate of the code? The problem comes if we try to detach the algorithm from the social world in order to analyse its properties and powers— seeing it as a technical and self-contained object that exists as a distinct presence is likely to be a mis take. Detaching the algorithm in order to ask what it does requires separating the algorithm from the social world in the first place and then to treat it as a separate entity to those social processes. Algorithms are inevitably modelled on visions of the social world, and with outcomes in mind, outcomes influenced by commercial or other interests and agendas (as discussed by Williamson, this issue). As well as being produced from a social context, the algorithms are lived with, they are an integral part of that social world; they are woven into practices and outcomes” (David, 2017, p. 4).

In this context, utopian ambitions are linked to what algorithms might potentially offer: a flawless future without corruption, racial division, or parochial interests, in favor of what benefits society as a whole. From this emerges the necessity of a digital social contract—a contract compelled by the need to understand the relationship between citizen and machine.

Nevertheless, entering the digital age deeply changes the nature of power—not only in its tools, but in its structure and sources of legitimacy. The digital revolution has produced a new model of social and political relations based on algorithms, data, and technological platforms that now influence individual and collective behavior, redrawing the public sphere in unprecedented ways. In this framework, calls have emerged to rethink concepts such as democracy, citizenship, and legitimacy, and to develop what is now called the “digital social

contract,” an attempt to adapt the classical contractual framework to new realities of digital power.

Yet between the theoretical ambitions that promised a more transparent, inclusive digital democracy and the complex reality of invisible forms of control, surveillance, and direction, there exists a deep gap demanding critical analysis. Are traditional political theories still able to interpret this transformation? What are the limits of their capacity to encompass the new structure of power? Is the “digital social contract” a natural extension of the democratic model, or does it re-produce patterns of control under the guise of technical modernity?

2.1 Theoretical Approaches to the Transformation of Digital Power

Political power dissolves in the age of liquid modernity; power now exists in a global space beyond the confines of the nation/state. Yet politics, once tied to personal and public interests, remains local and unable to operate effectively on a planetary level. Power without political control becomes a profound concern, while politics seem increasingly disconnected from the real problems and anxieties of many people” (Bauman & Leon, 2017, p. 29).

Concerning the types and forms of governance, Bodin held that the ideal blend of rule may achieve consensus—even under a single ruler—if the ruler distributes his influence equally among different social classes (Bodin, p. 110).

For philosophers, political science has always been inseparable from ethics. The book *Politics* by Aristotle begins with propositions about human nature and obligations toward authority. Political philosophy concerns freedom (Introduction to *Politics*, 1947, p. 6). More broadly, politics in its most widespread meaning is the science of power and its organization in societies (Duverger, 1964). Thought is defined as “the work of the mind over phenomena to reach their true understanding; it includes reasoning and reflection opposed to intuition” (Saliba, 1982, pp. 154-155). The theory’s value lies in how precisely it analyzes phenomena based on given data (Hill, 1977, p. 567).

Political theory is divided into two major strands:

- 1- **Classical political theory:** which begins with assumptions about human nature and duties toward power, as seen in Plato, Hume, etc.
- 2- **Modern political theory:** more focused on political practice than purely philosophical abstraction; includes those who revisit old concepts such as justice, those who analyze individual political behavior, and others—starting with thinkers like Ernest Barker—who connect political ideas with political behavior (Bailey, 2005, p. 512).

There are four foundational approaches to research in political theory (Mohanna, 2009, pp. 45-55):

- 1- A **historical method**, exemplified by Sabine, which traces political theory back to its roots in Greece, via Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau.
- 2- A **sociological method**, as with George J. Catlin, linking politics with the general theory of society.
- 3- A **philosophical method**, represented by Leo Strauss, which views values as indispensable in political philosophy.

- 4- An **integrated method**, exemplified by Carl J. Friedrich, which sees the necessity of combining insights from sociology, psychology, etc., because political science relates to individual, society, state, and beyond.

2.2 Digital Democracy's Disillusionments and the Challenges of the Digital Contract

Historical governance of city-states and kingdoms, which once followed their own laws before conquest, provides insight. Machiavelli observes that when states accustomed to freedom under their own laws are taken over, there are three ways to rule them: by abolishing their laws; by settling in and ruling directly; or by allowing them to keep their old laws while paying tribute. A government composed of a few loyal individuals can maintain control so long as it retains the ruler's favor. Control through citizens can sometimes be even more effective than external coercion when the city has enjoyed freedom (Machiavelli, p. 36).

The story of democracy is as much a story of failure as of success: failures to transcend existing boundaries, temporary successes followed by massive defeats, utopian promises that ended in disappointment and despair. Compared with its highest ideal, actual democracy reveals such visible lack that the discrepancy between the ideal and the real inspires constant hope that perhaps the ideal might somehow come true (Dahl, p. 519).

Political and social order in a post-human world will undergo profound transformation, *especially* under AI. Many democratic systems have faltered in practice: leaders elected via democratic means who later transform into authoritarian rulers.

The French Revolution had immense impact on human rights and democracy: it marked a radical *turning* point after long suffering under absolute monarchy, the power of clergy, and feudal structures. It culminated in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in 1789, a foundational document for rights and freedoms.

For Rousseau, the tangled relationship between natural liberty and civil liberty is a pact of mutual gain between citizens as individuals and the public authority that unites them. "Through the social contract man loses his natural liberty but gains civil liberty."

A pivotal moment in rights history came when rulers were no longer considered divine, but instead as representatives, then power began to shift to popular and national sovereignty.

Socrates viewed one of democracy's main flaws as the incompetence of many officeholders chosen by lot; he distrusted popular assemblies and their power to elevate the unwise to positions of influence. He has been known to mock that the assembly might vote for donkeys instead of horses if the former were preferred (Nersisian, p. 100).

The transformations affecting traditional democracy may have profound consequences for governance: reducing human participation in decision-making, delegating some or all political agency to AI and intelligent machines. Used wisely, AI might aid in more judicious decisions, resolving dilemmas that affect social, economic, political life. But the risk of machine dictatorship remains.

Respect for law is a hallmark of the "seven sages." For instance, Chillon is credited with saying "Obey the law". He believed the greatest city-state is one where citizens obey law more than orators. Similarly, the proverb "Obey the law that you make for yourself," attributed to Pittacus, was accepted by the people of Mytilene when they appointed a ten-year dictatorship

to protect them from exiled nobles. According to some, supreme authority resides in laws (Nersisian, p. 21).

Today, democracy enjoys global popularity. Most governing regimes claim some democratic practice; those that do not, often assert that their non-democratic status is a necessary *phase* toward democracy. Even authoritarian rulers now find it essential to adopt the language of democracy to endow their rule with legitimacy (Dahl, p. 12).

After the fall of the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages ushered in a new era in which religious *authority* dominated, leading to the church's preeminence in political, social, and economic life.

Bodin's theory rests on the principle of consensus between the nobility and the *common* people, between rich and poor. From these dynamics he preferred the monarchical form of rule, believing that each class has its own function: the nobles war and govern law; the common people occupy public offices; the rich seek honor (Bodin, p. 78).

As Raymond Aron wrote in 1944 in (L'homme contre les tyrans): "Myths, religions will be manipulated scientifically by cunning leaderships" (Aron, 1944, p. 21).

In a *post*-human world, values and societal political traditions will be reshaped, especially under liquid democracy—an era of fluid political systems where AI, intelligent devices, and robots tied into the web determine identity and culture. Boundaries between human and robot become liquid, entering the realm of civil and political rights in the post-human condition.

3. From Democracy to the Digital Social Contract: Transformations of Power in the Digital Age

Human life has evolved through pivotal historical eras that have driven profound transformations in its nature and progress, laying the groundwork for subsequent qualitative developments. With the emergence of representative democracy, methods of governance evolved from rulers who claimed divine authority to leaders who derive their legitimacy from the sovereignty of the people. "Given that algorithms are seen to be the decision-making parts of code, it is perhaps little surprise then that there is an interest in understanding how algorithms shape organisation, institutional, commercial and governmental decision-making. The second issue, which, related to the above, concerns the role of algorithms in such decision-making. This is to reflect on the role of algorithms in shaping how people are treated and judged. Orthewaythat algorithms shape outcomes and opportunities. This is to reflect on the way that algorithmic systems are built into organisational structures and to think about how they then shape decisions or become integrated into the choices that are made— and how those choices then become a part of people's lives. Karen Yeung's contribution explores the role of algorithms in regulation and governance. Yeung looks at the part played by algorithms and big data in 'design-based' regulation" (David, 2017, p.4).

Today, we have entered the digital age, which is reshaping political and social participation through algorithms and advanced technologies. This shift is prompting a redefinition of the relationship between citizens and power.

As technological advancements continue, and with the rise of new digital rights and a new kind of relationship based on digital foundations, a concept is emerging that can be described as the "digital social contract".

3.1 Democracy as a Model for Breaching the Boundaries of Power

Democracy emerged in antiquity with the Athenian city-state, which became the cradle of the democratic process (though Rome also offered a model of representative democracy through its republican system). Citizens—exclusively free males, with women, foreigners, and slaves excluded—participated in decision-making through public assemblies and councils.

Democracy is one of the richest and most evolved political concepts, having undergone significant development over the centuries. During the Renaissance, the ideas of John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau introduced new understandings of freedom and natural rights (a topic to be addressed further in the next chapter on revolutionary transformations).

A major turning point occurred with the American and French Revolutions, which brought about the widespread adoption of democratic ideals following long centuries of absolute monarchy and despotism.

Robert Dahl argues that “Democracy is an instrument of freedom in three ways” (Dahl, 1971, pp. 1–16):

- 1- **Free, fair, and honest elections:** These require a certain degree of freedom of expression, organization, and opposition.
- 2- **Democracy enables self-determination:** It allows individuals to live under laws they themselves have chosen.
- 3- **It facilitates moral sovereignty:** Every citizen becomes capable of normative judgment and autonomous decision-making, promoting human growth, responsibility, intelligence, and protection of shared interests.

Thus, the “government of the people” becomes the only legitimate source of authority serving the public good. According to Aristotle, the most suitable form of government was the civil or constitutional polity—a blend of democracy and oligarchy. He viewed the city-state (or political system) as a framework for political participation, and warned that deviant forms of constitutions, particularly tyranny, represented the worst distortions of governance (Nersisian, p. 151).

Dahl notes that early democrats breached the prior limits of traditional governance—be it monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, or autocracy—by establishing new structures based on majority rule in democratic or republican city-states. Two millennia later, democracy extended its reach to the nation-state, replacing old institutions with polyarchic forms of governance grounded in popular sovereignty (Dahl, p. 518).

In the modern era, particularly from the 19th and 20th centuries onward, democracy expanded beyond parliamentarism to encompass broad political, economic, and social dimensions. Technological innovations like the internet and social media have further enhanced citizen participation, making democracy more interactive and flexible.

3.2 The Digital Social Contract

The social contract represents the most important political theory that governs the relationship between citizen and ruler, and its most prominent theorists include Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This theory aimed to regulate the relationship between the ruler and the ruled by preserving rights and freedoms, and this is done by individuals giving up some of their freedoms to public authority for the purpose of

protecting the rest of the rights and freedoms and for the public good. Today, with the rapid development of technology and our entry into the era of artificial intelligence, we need to re-establish a new concept of the social contract that keeps pace with the ongoing development. This is due to the digital rights that have emerged as a result of this development, which creates a new relationship between citizens and the state, and consequently increases the state's duties to protect these digital rights and freedoms.

The term “contract” comes from the Latin *contractus*, and appears in French as *contrat*, and in English as *contract*. In Arabic, the root word “*aqada*” implies binding, tying, or concluding, as in “tying a rope” or “making a pact” (Ibn Manzur, 1999, p. 309). The term implies mutual obligations and agreements (Al-Wakshari, 1998, p. 665). Philosophically, it refers to any relationship involving reciprocal commitments among two or more parties (Lalande, 2001, p. 224).

The political contract thus serves as the foundation for organizing public life, reconciling the general will with individual desires, and preventing competition over interests from escalating into destructive conflict (Chevallier, 1980, p. 35).

For Rousseau, freedom and equality are natural gifts: “Men are born free and equal, and no parent has the right to deprive them of this inheritance” (Rousseau, 2012, p. 119).

Hobbes, meanwhile, believed that peace is a natural law stemming from the rational realization that life under absolute individual freedom is intolerable (Hobbes, 1982, p. 96). He contrasted chaotic, violent societies with civil ones governed by contracts (Hobbes, 1982, p. 146). In his view, the sovereign is the sole legislator and judge during times of both peace and war (Hobbes, 2002, p. 32).

John Locke held that civil authorities must ensure equal legal protections for all individuals: “No one has the right to infringe on another’s life, health, liberty, or possessions” (Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 1988, p. 76). He emphasized that the law of reason reveals that all people are free and equal, and that the legislative authority must serve the common good (Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, p. 19).

However, Locke excluded enslaved individuals from civil society, arguing they had forfeited their rights and property, and therefore could not be considered members of the political community (Locke, 1959, p. 168).

In today’s age of liquid democracy, concepts of authority and society are undergoing substantial shifts. Technological advances and evolving social dynamics have led to more fluid and fragile identities. This affects political relationships between citizens and the state, making the delineation of rights and authority more complex. It calls for a new formulation of the social contract that aligns with the emerging concept of the “digital social contract”—one that addresses several key dimensions:

1- Privacy and Data Protection:

In traditional contracts, individuals relinquish certain rights for the public good. However, in the digital world, personal data—once protected by law—is often surrendered in exchange for access to digital platforms. Given the centrality of the digital realm, a digital contract must safeguard individual privacy.

2- Digital Rights:

As the classical social contract focused on offline freedoms, the digital age demands recognition of new rights—such as digital freedom of expression, access to information, and protection from identity theft. States must build national strategies to regulate and protect rights in algorithmic societies.

3- Digital Justice:

The dominance of tech corporations in shaping digital content can create disparities. Unequal internet access and algorithmic bias can entrench digital inequality. Ensuring digital justice is essential to prevent marginalization and foster equitable participation in digital life.

4- Regulating the Digital Public Sphere:

As digital platforms facilitate mass expression—sometimes threatening public order—governments must develop mechanisms to balance free speech with national security. In digital spaces, forms of “digital protest” or “electronic disobedience”.

4. Conclusion

The concept of authority has evolved slowly since the emergence of the interventionist state, as if constitutional theories had entered a state of stagnation following the developments of the twentieth century. Today, however, with the advent of the digital age and the rise of artificial intelligence, the role of authority has become highly significant in matters related to fundamental rights and freedoms—particularly as artificial intelligence and technological progress have become intertwined with the ways power is formed and exercised.

On the other hand, individuals now practice their fundamental rights and freedoms through social media platforms and applications powered by artificial intelligence. This reveals a growing challenge regarding the future of the relationship between citizens—who seek to enjoy their rights and freedoms—and governments, which aim to achieve the public good.

In our view, following the interventionist state, a digital state has emerged, characterized by the power of artificial intelligence, which increasingly intervenes in all aspects of political, economic, and social life.

Conclusions:

- 1- A fundamental transformation has emerged in the concept of authority.
- 2- The social contract is entering a new stage linked to digital rights.
- 3- A new category of digital rights and freedoms has emerged.

Recommendations:

- 1- Enact new legislation that keeps pace with developments in algorithms and artificial intelligence.
- 2- Integrate artificial intelligence into educational programs at schools and universities.
- 3- Ensure the democratic use of artificial intelligence and prevent a slide into digital authoritarianism by establishing mechanisms that safeguard rights and freedoms.

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