



The political dimension of administrative decision-making under automation: Structural shifts in public administration

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■ **Abstract.** The article aimed to explain how automation structurally transforms the political dimension of administrative decision-making in public administration. Rather than treating automation as a purely technical or organisational innovation, the study conceptualised it as a governance practice that reallocates judgment, responsibility, and legitimacy within administrative systems. Drawing on contemporary theories of bureaucracy and algorithmic governance, the article argued that automation does not eliminate political choice but displaces it from the moment of individual decision-making to the design of procedures, models, and infrastructures that predefine possible outcomes. To capture this transformation analytically, the article introduced the concept of “points of shift” through which automation reshapes political decision-making. Four such shifts are identified: the shift of legitimacy from public justification to technical authority; the shift of responsibility from individual judgment to system architecture; the transformation of political conflict into technical critique; and the increasing invisibility of political choice through its infrastructural embedding. Particular attention is paid to why artificial intelligence intensifies these shifts. Unlike rule-based automation, AI combines data-driven knowledge production, prediction, and semi-autonomous execution, resulting in adaptive and scalable forms of governance in which normative assumptions are embedded in models rather than articulated through political processes. The article concluded that automation – especially when based on AI – does not depoliticise public administration but produces a new mode of political ordering that is less visible, less localised, and more resistant to democratic scrutiny. These findings of the article have practical relevance for policymakers, regulators, and public administrators by highlighting how political choices are embedded in system design and infrastructural arrangements, thereby informing more reflective approaches to the regulation and oversight of automated decision-making

■ **Keywords:** artificial intelligence; political dimension of governance; algorithmic governance; responsibility; legitimacy; politicality; procedural rationality

■ Introduction

Automation has become one of the defining trends in the transformation of public administration in the twenty-first century. Recent research increasingly treats automation not merely as a technological upgrade, but as a reconfiguration of governance practices that reshapes how administrative decisions are produced, justified, and contested. P.R.B. Fortes *et al.* (2022) showed that contemporary policy and expert discourse frames automation primarily through promises of efficiency, predictability, and neutrality, presenting automated systems as capable of minimising human error and ensuring uniform rule application. At the

same time, this framing situated automation as a central mechanism through which administrative authority is reorganised rather than simply optimised.

While automation is often portrayed as a means of neutralising discretion, contemporary public administration scholarship demonstrates that decision-making under automated conditions does not eliminate judgment but redistributes it across organisational and technical layers. P. Cantarelli *et al.* (2023) emphasised that even data-intensive governance relies on interpretative processes, as information does not translate directly into determinate

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choices. Similarly, L. Diver (2021) conceptualised automated decisions not as discrete acts of will, but as outcomes emerging from procedural architectures, models, and predictive systems, challenging classical understandings of decision-making as a momentary exercise of choice. At the same time, this very claim to neutrality makes automation conceptually problematic from the perspective of the political nature of administrative decision-making. Recent political and administrative theory increasingly conceptualises automation as a transformation of political ordering rather than a process of depoliticisation. A. Öjehag-Pettersson *et al.* (2024) argued that automation reorganises the political dimension of governance by altering the visibility, locus, and contestability of decision-making power. In this view, political choice does not disappear but becomes embedded within system design, standards, and infrastructures, making it less perceptible as an explicit act of decision.

This transformation has significant implications for legitimacy and authority in public administration. U.B.U. Roehl & M.B. Hansen (2024) demonstrated that automated administrative decision-making increasingly derives legitimacy from procedural compliance, standards, and auditability rather than from public justification or identifiable decision-makers. A. Oraldi (2023) similarly showed how contemporary technocratic governance reframes political and ethical questions as matters of technical adequacy, reinforcing a shift from deliberative justification to system-based validation. The political consequences of automation become particularly visible in the domains of conflict and responsibility. Empirical studies by A. Kaun *et al.* (2024) revealed that while citizens often experience automated decisions as opaque and unfair, these negative perceptions rarely translate into articulated political claims, remaining instead at the level of individualised dissatisfaction. S. Maalsen (2023) explained this gap by pointing to epistemic exclusions embedded in algorithmic systems, where lived experience and situated knowledge cannot be translated into data-readable forms. From this perspective, conflict is not eliminated but rendered politically inexpressible. Finally, contemporary governance frameworks increasingly respond to these challenges through managerial and procedural solutions. M. Esposito & T. Tse (2024) showed that AI governance regimes emphasise safeguards, risk management, and compliance architectures, treating legitimacy as a function of system design rather than political contestation.

Against this background, the aim of the article was to provide a conceptual analysis of how automation transforms the political dimension of administrative decision-making in public administration. In line with this aim, the article pursued three interrelated analytical objectives. First, it sought to conceptually decouple the political dimension of administrative decision-making from the institutional status of actors and the formal presence of discretion, treating politicality as a structural property of decisions and showing that politicality persists even under conditions of high formalisation and automation. Second,

it reconstructed automation in public administration as a continuum of governance practices based on the delegation of decision-making to formalised systems, rather than as a phenomenon limited to the introduction of artificial intelligence. Third, it identified key structural shifts through which automation transforms the political dimension of administrative decision-making, including shifts in legitimacy, responsibility, the form of conflict, and the visibility of political choice and clarifies how algorithmic and AI-based systems tend to intensify these shifts by embedding political choices within infrastructural and procedural arrangements.

The article was theoretical and analytical in nature and did not aim to provide an empirical evaluation of specific automated systems. Instead, it advanced a conceptual framework that explains why automated administrative decisions remain political even when they are presented as technically necessary or procedurally neutral. In this sense, the study contributed to public administration theory by complementing existing debates on automation with an analysis of its political effects, which cannot be reduced either to questions of efficiency or to issues of technical design.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted within a qualitative theoretical and analytical framework oriented toward the conceptual reconstruction of the political dimension of automated administrative decision-making in public administration. Rather than examining the performance or outcomes of specific technological systems, the analysis focused on identifying structural transformations through which automation reshaped the organisation of administrative decision-making and the articulation of its political dimension. Accordingly, the study was analytical in character and did not rely on empirical measurement or instrumental evaluation of automated systems.

The scholarly literature used in the study was identified through targeted searches conducted in major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search process relied on combinations of keywords such as “automated decision-making”, “algorithmic governance”, “administrative decision-making”, “political dimension”, and “public administration”. Rather than applying a strict chronological threshold, the literature selection prioritised recent publications (2020-2025) addressing contemporary forms of automated and algorithmic governance, while selectively incorporating earlier foundational works where they provided indispensable theoretical reference points. Selection criteria emphasised thematic relevance to the transformation of administrative decision-making under conditions of automation, particularly with regard to authority, judgment, legitimacy, responsibility, and political contestation. Studies addressing automation exclusively from a technical, engineering, or implementation-oriented perspective were excluded unless they contributed directly to the analysis of governance logics.

The material base of the analysis comprised three analytically distinct groups of sources. The first group included contemporary research on automated decision-making, algorithmic regulation, and data-driven governance, which was used to identify and systematise structural transformations in legitimacy, responsibility, the form of conflict, and the visibility of political choice. The second group consisted of classical and critical works in political theory and public administration, which served as conceptual anchors for defining the political dimension of administrative decision-making and for distinguishing it from purely technical or managerial rationalities. In addition, empirically oriented case studies of automated systems in areas such as social policy and labour markets were used as illustrative material. These cases were not treated as objects of comparative or evaluative analysis but were employed to assess the coherence of the conceptual framework with observed practices of automated governance and to clarify how structural transformations manifest in concrete administrative settings.

Methodologically, the analysis relied on a combination of conceptual analysis and analytical reconstruction. Conceptual analysis was used to clarify and distinguish key concepts, including the political dimension of administrative decision-making, judgment, automation, and automated decision-making, and to differentiate these categories from adjacent notions such as digitalisation and decision-support systems. Analytical reconstruction was applied to trace how changes in the organisation of administrative decision-making – particularly the transition from street-level to system-level bureaucracy – affected the localisation of choice, responsibility, and the possibilities for political contestation. A structural approach to the analysis of automation played a central role in the methodology. Rather than focusing on the intentions of individual actors or on the technical characteristics of specific systems, automation was examined as a governance regime that transformed the conditions under which power was exercised. This approach made it possible to analyse automated administrative decisions independently of their level of technological complexity – from formalised rules and procedures to AI-based systems – by concentrating on how the localisation of judgment and political choice shifted within these regimes.

The analytical process was carried out in several stages. First, a theoretical framework of the political nature of administrative decision-making was developed, enabling the political dimension to be separated from the institutional status of actors and the formal presence of discretion. Second, automation was conceptualised as a continuum of governance practices based on the delegation of decision-making to formalised systems. In the final stage, a synthesis of theoretical sources was used to identify key structural shifts through which automation reorganised the political dimension of public administration, including shifts in legitimacy, responsibility, the form of conflict, and the visibility of political choice. The limitations of the

study are related to its conceptual character. The study did not claim to provide an exhaustive empirical analysis of specific automated systems, nor did it seek to propose normative models of regulation. Its findings should therefore be understood as an analytical framework suitable for further empirical and normative research on automated administrative decision-making and algorithmic governance.

■ Results and Discussion

The political nature of administrative decisions

In this study, the political nature of administrative decisions is not reduced to party competition, electoral processes, or ideological rivalry. The analytical starting point is the distinction between politics and the political proposed by C. Mouffe (2005), where the political is understood as a dimension of antagonism and exclusion that is constitutive of any social order. In this sense, politicality emerges not at the level of actors' intentions, but at the level of the structure of decisions – where choices are made between alternatives that lack a final rational resolution and cannot be reduced to purely technical optimisation. The distinction between politics and the political makes it possible to separate the institutional surface of governance from its deeper conflictual logic. Politics refers to the set of practices and institutions through which a particular order is established and maintained, whereas the political denotes the permanent condition of that order – value conflict and the inevitable exclusion of alternatives (Mouffe, 2005). For this reason, administrative decisions cannot be reduced to neutral acts of optimisation: every decision that stabilises a specific configuration of power simultaneously renders other possibilities unthinkable and thereby acquires a political dimension. The genealogical background of this position can be found in Carl Schmitt's understanding of the political as a specific type of distinction defined by the logic of collectively significant friend-enemy differentiation (Schmitt, 2007). In Mouffe's reinterpretation, this logic loses its normative radicalism but retains its key analytical effect: the political nature of administrative decisions can be identified independently of actors' intentions, since what matters is not who makes the decision, but which order it temporarily stabilises and which alternatives it excludes.

In public administration, decisions should therefore be understood not as technical operations or mechanical applications of rules, but as the central acts of administrative activity. In the classical line associated with H.A. Simon, as reconstructed in contemporary public administration theory by M. Mintrom (2016), it is the process of decision-making – rather than formal structures or procedures – that constitutes the core of administration. An administrative decision, in this sense, is always an act of choice: it affirms one possible course of action while excluding others and thus produces distributive effects, even in the absence of explicit political motivation. As M. Mintrom emphasises, rules merely structure the field of choice but do not eliminate choice itself or the need to evaluate alternatives and consequences. The existence of formalised standards does

not remove choice, since their application inevitably requires interpretation, the identification of relevant criteria, and the setting of thresholds of acceptability. Under conditions of bounded rationality, decisions are not the result of an exhaustive comparison of all alternatives, but are formed through the progressive narrowing of the space of possibilities, a substantial part of which remains structurally invisible to the organisation (Mintrom, 2016). Empirical studies of administrative decision-making further confirm that between information and decision there is always an interpretive layer shaped by cognitive mechanisms and contextual factors: even within evidence-based governance, the use of data does not automatically lead to a single determinate choice, but is affected by cognitive biases and decision noise (Cantarelli *et al.*, 2023). For this reason, the administrative decision constitutes a privileged point of entry for the political – a site where value conflict takes on a concrete administrative form, even when the decision is presented as procedurally neutral.

The political dimension of an administrative decision is thus expressed not in rhetoric or subjective intentions, but in the structural effects of choice itself. A decision becomes political when it distributes opportunities and risks, establishes hierarchies, defines the boundaries of the acceptable and the unacceptable, and stabilises a particular configuration of normality. The formalisation of such decisions transforms the mode in which political conflict is expressed, translating value-laden choices into the language of procedures, criteria, and thresholds. In this study, explicitly political decisions are not the direct object of analysis, but serve as an analytical point of reference for distinguishing between different types of decisions in public governance. In classical political theory, political decisions are recognised as an institutionally defined category of decisions associated with political offices and democratic mandates. Thus, M. Weber (1946) drew a fundamental distinction between political activity and administrative management, emphasising that the requirement of neutrality (*sine ira et studio*) applies to civil servants, whereas political actors are obliged to act in a value-oriented and conflictual manner and to assume personal responsibility for the consequences of their decisions. Similarly, in contemporary legal doctrine, political offices are defined as positions that entail open value choice and are linked to political rather than disciplinary or legal responsibility (Tkachenko, 2016; Balamush & Dobrovolska, 2021). For this reason, political decisions do not constitute an analytical problem for the study of politicality as such: their political nature is institutionally recognised and openly contestable. Analytical difficulty arises elsewhere – where decisions with comparable value-laden consequences are made outside political status but are presented as neutral administrative or technical acts.

In public administration research, the political nature of decisions is traditionally associated with the concept of discretion, understood as the institutionally permitted space of choice available to officials in the implementation of policy. The classical concept of street-level bureaucracy

demonstrates that discretion is a structural condition of policy implementation under constraints of limited resources, time pressure, and uncertain goals (Camillo, 2017). However, discretion alone does not explain where politicality is located: even when discretion is formally narrowed or eliminated, choice does not disappear, but is realised through standards, checklists, and automated calculations that shift power from the level of execution to the system level of rule and criteria design. It is precisely here that the distinction between discretion and judgment becomes necessary. While discretion refers to an institutionally permitted space of choice, judgment, in the sense developed by H. Arendt, is an autonomous act of practical weighing and responsibility that cannot be reduced to the application of an existing rule and may operate even in the absence of formal choice (Burdon, 2015). Judgment is a precondition of responsibility and the point at which a decision acquires political meaning, since it is through judgment that relevant principles, criteria, and thresholds of admissibility are determined. In this sense, the political nature of administrative decisions is linked not so much to the presence of discretion as to the localisation of judgment – in the design of rules, standards, and systems that formally appear neutral but in fact entrench value choices.

The claim to neutrality in such systems does not eliminate politicality, but transforms the mode of its legitimisation. In M. Weber's classical understanding of rationalisation, the demand for impartiality applies to administrative execution but does not imply the disappearance of value choice as such. In J. Habermas's critical theory (Oraldi, 2023), this shift is described as a technocratic reduction of practical and ethical-political questions to technical ones, where efficiency becomes the sole criterion of decision adequacy. In this logic, the technical language of procedures, standards, and metrics performs a legitimating function: political decisions are justified not through public weighing of values, but through appeals to science, technology, or the "internal logic" of systems, creating an illusion of apolitical governance. As a result, value choice does not disappear but is relocated into the design of procedures and criteria, making the political less visible in the language of administration while remaining no less decisive for the structure and consequences of decisions.

Points of shift:

Where automation transforms the political

If an administrative decision is understood as an act of choice in which judgment is localised and the political dimension of governance is manifested, the next analytical step is to examine what happens to this choice in the process of automation. Building on the established understanding of administrative decision-making as a structured act of choice, the next analytical step is to examine how this choice is reconfigured under conditions of automation. Within this continuum, contemporary algorithmic and AI-based systems do not constitute a qualitatively different phenomenon, but rather represent a radicalisation

of a long-standing administrative logic of delegating decision-making to formalised systems. In public administration, automation should therefore be understood not as a technical innovation or a subtype of digitalisation, but as an administrative practice of delegating the function of decision-making or decision execution to formalised systems. Within the classical tradition of street-level bureaucracy, such instruments are interpreted as organisational responses to structural constraints of administrative activity – resource scarcity, time pressure, and goal ambiguity (Camillo, 2017). Such instruments narrow the space of individual choice at the level of execution by relocating judgment to the system level, where rules, criteria, and thresholds are designed *ex ante*. Recent public administration research further emphasises that automated decision-making should be conceptualised as a reconfiguration of authority and control within administrative systems rather than as a mere technological upgrade, insofar as it redistributes decision-making power across organisational levels and procedures (Roehl & Hansen, 2024).

In contemporary approaches to algorithmic governance, this shift is described as the delegation of regulatory functions to algorithmic systems capable of making or executing decisions without direct human intervention (Yeung, 2017). Crucially, this does not concern decision support, where systems merely inform officials, but automated intervention aimed at achieving predictability, standardisation, and control by minimising the role of individual choice at the stage of execution. It is in this sense that automation constitutes a relevant object for analysing the political nature of administrative decisions. From this perspective, automated decision-making ADM operates as a form of governance in which questions of good administration and good governance are addressed not through *ex ante* political justification, but through *ex post* procedural evaluation and compliance with formal standards (Roehl & Hansen, 2024). In public administration practices, ADM operationalises the delegation of administrative decisions through standards, checklists, and automated calculations that translate case assessment into a routinised process of data collection, processing, and entry. Within the logic of street-level bureaucracy, such instruments are employed to unify decision execution under conditions of resource scarcity and time constraints, where outcomes are determined by predefined rules rather than situational assessment of individual cases (Camillo, 2017). In this regime, the decision is implemented not as an act of direct weighing of alternatives in the interaction between an official and an addressee, but as the execution of a logic embedded in the system. As a result, administrative decision-making increasingly functions at the system level, where governance concerns are articulated in terms of procedural robustness, consistency, and accountability frameworks rather than individual judgment (Roehl & Hansen, 2024).

The key characteristic of ADM is therefore not the elimination of choice, but a change in its localisation. In the process of automation, power is shifted from the

level of frontline execution to the system level of designing rules, criteria, thresholds, and categories that predetermine possible decision outcomes. The transition from street-level to system-level bureaucracy is accompanied by the transfer of control over decisions from frontline officials to analysts and system designers who construct the parameters of decision-making (Camillo, 2017). In this configuration, the legitimacy of decisions is increasingly anchored in system design and procedural conformity, rather than in the situational reasoning of individual administrators (Roehl & Hansen, 2024). In this respect, ADM differs fundamentally from AI-assisted decision support. While decision support systems inform or structure the decision-making process while leaving responsibility with the official, automated decisions involve direct execution or intervention without an actual human act of decision-making, which constitutes their specific administrative feature (Yeung, 2017). It is precisely this distinction that makes ADM a relevant object for analysing transformations of the political dimension of administrative decisions.

Unlike ADM, AI-assisted decision support does not replace judgment, but merely channels attention and structures the informational environment of choice. In classical administrative theory, rules and information are understood as instruments of bounded rationality that guide decision-making processes without assuming responsibility for choice itself (Mintrom, 2016). The fundamental difference between decision support and automation lies not in the level of technological complexity, but in the localisation of judgment. As K. Yeung (2017) emphasised, algorithmic regulation is not a form of decision support, since it entails execution or intervention without contemporaneous human judgment. This distinction makes it possible to clearly differentiate supportive digital tools from automated decisions in public administration.

Automation in public administration does not eliminate the political dimension of administrative decision-making, but systematically transforms the way in which it manifests itself. While classical approaches associate the political nature of governance with discretion, personalised judgment, and a visible act of choice at the level of execution, under conditions of automation it increasingly emerges outside the immediate moment of decision-making – within the design of procedures, criteria, metrics, and systems that predetermine possible outcomes. In this configuration, political judgment is exercised upstream, at the level of system design, rather than in situational administrative interaction. To analytically capture this transformation, this section does not propose an exhaustive typology of the effects of automation, but instead identifies key points of shift through which the political dimension of administrative decision-making is transformed. These shifts do not concern isolated technical or organisational changes, but rather structural transformations that affect the basic conditions of politicality in governance – namely, how decisions are legitimised, where responsibility is localised, in what form conflict is artic-

ulated, and how visible political choice remains. In this sense, the identification of four shifts – the shift in legitimacy, the shift in responsibility, the shift in conflict, and the shift in the visibility of the political – is not arbitrary. These shifts correspond to four analytical dimensions within which classical theories of public administration and political theory typically locate the political nature of decisions: public justification, personal accountability, open value conflict, and the possibility of articulating the political in the public sphere. It is precisely these dimensions that are systematically transformed under conditions of automated and algorithmic governance.

The proposed approach does not seek to reduce the politicality of automation to a specific technology or type of system. On the contrary, it demonstrates that the key transformations occur regardless of the level of technological complexity – from formalised procedures and standards to algorithmic and AI-based systems. Each of the identified shifts captures not an “effect of AI”, but a change in the way administrative decision-making itself is organised. Thus, analysing points of shift makes it possible to move beyond viewing automation as an instrumental or technical innovation and to conceptualise it as a factor transforming the political ontology of public administration. What is at stake is not the depoliticisation of governance, but a change in the forms through which the political becomes present, visible, and contestable in contemporary decision-making regimes.

Shift from public to technical legitimacy

In classical models of public administration, the legitimacy of an administrative decision is grounded in the possibility of its public justification. A decision is considered acceptable not merely because it complies with a procedure, but primarily because it can be explained in terms of reasons, goals, and value priorities that are intelligible beyond the internal logic of the administrative system. Even under conditions of high formalisation, governance retained the requirement that decisions could be questioned, politically contested, or justified in the public sphere. In the process of automation, this regime of legitimacy undergoes a significant shift. As J. Habermas (1968) argued, as scientific and technical rationality becomes embedded in social institutions, traditional forms of legitimacy are gradually displaced by appeals to efficiency, necessity, and systemic functionality. The question “why is this decision acceptable?” is replaced by the assertion “this is required by the rationality of the system”, where legitimacy no longer depends on the articulation of reasons but on conformity with technical form. In this sense, technical form does not eliminate political motivation but conceals it by presenting it as objective necessity. For J. Habermas, this rationalisation does not neutralise power; rather, domination becomes technically justified and less visible, as legitimacy is secured by procedures, standards, and systems that function as carriers of authority rather than by public deliberation.

This shift is clearly illustrated by D. Beer’s (2016) analysis of the role of metrics in contemporary governance. Numerical indicators and measurement systems perform not only an informational but also a legitimating function: decisions grounded in metrics appears objective and impersonal, as if they had directly “emerged” from data rather than from choice. In this mode, numbers replace arguments, and the correctness of calculation substitutes for political justification. Metrics make it possible to implement administrative decisions without their explicit political articulation, transforming complex value choices into outcomes presented as technically determined. Recent analytical and policy-oriented accounts of data-driven governance make this transformation of legitimacy explicit by framing administrative decision-making as a function of data collection, processing, and interpretation (Haitsma & Brink, 2025). Within this perspective, legitimacy is increasingly attributed to the quality of data inputs, the design of analytical models, and the robustness of decision-support infrastructures, while questions of value choice and democratic authorisation are treated as external to the decision process itself. Decisions are thus described as legitimate because they are “data-informed” or “data-driven”, implying that correctness follows from the proper functioning of the informational and procedural pipeline rather than from deliberative validation, a logic already identified in D. Beer’s (2016) analysis of metric-based governance.

Within contemporary public administration research, this transformation of legitimacy is explicitly institutionalised in the context of automated decision-making. As U.B.U. Roehl & M.B. Hansen (2024) demonstrated, ADM systems are not legitimised through public justification of individual decisions, but through their conformity with predefined procedures, standards, and governance frameworks that are assessed *ex post*. Legitimacy is thus anchored in procedural robustness, compliance, and system design, whereby questions of acceptability are addressed through audits, safeguards, and formal accountability mechanisms rather than through political contestation. In this sense, what J. Habermas (1968) described as technocratic legitimation becomes operationalised in public administration as a routine mode of governing through automated systems, in which legitimacy is embedded in decision-making infrastructures rather than articulated through reasons accessible to affected publics (Haitsma & Brink, 2025). A similar mechanism is described by F. Pasquale (2015) in his analysis of algorithmic decision-making systems. He shows that an increasing number of administrative decisions are legitimised not through explanations of their underlying grounds, but through references to the formal correctness, complexity, and alleged autonomy of algorithmic procedures. In this sense, the algorithm functions as a “black box” within which normative and institutional assumptions are concealed, while externally the outcome is presented as neutral and inevitable. What appears in F. Pasquale’s account as opacity and concealment

is subsequently reproduced in policy-oriented discourse in a proceduralised and normalised form.

Building on these critical diagnoses, contemporary policy-oriented approaches to algorithmic governance reproduce this shift in legitimacy in a particularly explicit form. In recent discussions of generative AI in the public sector, legitimacy is increasingly framed as a function of procedural safeguards – risk assessments, ethical checklists, transparency mechanisms, and governance frameworks designed to ensure “responsible” AI use (Esposito & Tse, 2024). Here, governance is presented as legitimate insofar as it follows formally specified processes of data governance, model oversight, and risk management, regardless of whether the underlying policy goals or value priorities have been subject to democratic contestation (Haitsma & Brink, 2025). Political choice is thereby translated into questions of procedural adequacy, institutional design, and technical risk mitigation.

Taken together, these approaches allow the shift in legitimacy to be described as a transition from public justification to technical authority. An administrative decision is recognised as legitimate not because it is convincingly justified in the public sphere, but because it conforms to the formal logic of a system, metric, or algorithm. Legitimacy is thus effectively “pre-packaged” within data infrastructures and decision procedures themselves, rather than emerging from processes of public reasoning and contestation (Haitsma & Brink, 2025). Even when framed as “ethical” or “responsible”, such legitimacy remains grounded in procedural correctness rather than in democratic articulation of alternatives (Esposito & Tse, 2024). The political dimension does not disappear in this process, but becomes less visible: it is relocated to the design of procedures, criteria, and models that determine what counts as rational, efficient, and permissible. It is precisely in this transformation that the first key point of shift can be identified – through which automation reshapes the political dimension of administrative decision-making.

Importantly, empirical research on public attitudes toward automated decision-making indicates that this shift toward technical authority is not socially self-evident. Comparative studies of public perceptions suggest that procedural correctness and technological sophistication alone are insufficient to secure legitimacy for automated administrative decisions (Haitsma & Brink, 2025). More detailed empirical analyses by A. Kaun *et al.* (2024) further demonstrate that public acceptance of automated decision-making varies significantly across administrative domains and national contexts. In Estonia, public acceptance of automated decision-making tends to be higher in low-risk and routine administrative domains, but declines where decisions affect individual rights or provide limited opportunities for appeal. In Sweden, citizens display stronger expectations of human involvement and contestability, particularly in high-stakes welfare-related decisions, despite generally high levels of institutional trust. In Germany, scepticism toward automated decision-making is closely associated with

concerns about legal accountability and the ability to challenge decisions through formal procedures. Across these cases, public trust depends less on technical correctness as such than on the perceived availability of responsibility, justification, and meaningful avenues for contestation, indicating that legitimacy grounded in technical and procedural authority remains contingent and context-dependent rather than socially guaranteed (Kaun *et al.*, 2024).

Taken together, these dynamics indicate that automation does not simply modify how administrative decisions are made, but restructures the very grounds on which they are recognised as legitimate. Public justification is increasingly displaced by technical authority embedded in procedures, metrics, and decision infrastructures, while political choice is relocated to the design of systems rather than articulated in the public sphere. As a result, legitimacy becomes less a matter of contestable reasons and more a property of institutionalised technical forms – a transformation that reconfigures, rather than eliminates, the political dimension of administrative decision-making.

Shift in the localisation of responsibility

In automated regimes of public administration, administrative decisions continue to produce real and often significant consequences for individuals, yet they can increasingly rarely be attributed to a clearly identifiable responsible subject. The decision no longer appears as the outcome of an act of human judgment, but rather as an effect of the functioning of a system organised around procedures, standards, and automated execution. In contemporary techno-scientific regimes of governance, responsibility is systematically displaced from individual judgment to risk assessment procedures and expert frameworks, enabling politically consequential decisions to be taken without clearly defined personal authorship (Jasanoff, 2016).

Recent political studies of automated governance by A. Öjehag-Pettersson *et al.* (2024) identified this displacement of responsibility as one of the core transformations introduced by algorithmic systems, alongside shifts in visibility, legitimacy, and modes of contestation. In this context, algorithmic systems do not create an entirely new problem of responsibility, but rather radicalise an already existing logic of its alienation. Responsibility formally remains in place, yet it is relocated away from the moment of decision-making toward the level of procedural architecture, which significantly complicates its localisation (Yeung, 2017). A key mechanism of this shift lies in the delegation not only of execution, but of the very structure of choice to automated systems. Decision parameters are defined *ex ante* – at the stages of programming, translating legal norms into code, and setting target indicators – while direct interaction with the addressee is reduced to the automatic application of a pre-defined logic. Recent analyses of (semi-)automated administrative decision-making by L. Haitsma & B. Brink (2025) further showed that this diffusion of responsibility is reinforced by governance models that replace direct human intervention with

formally structured “human involvement”, in which responsibility is distributed across data inputs, models, indicators, and institutional procedures rather than concentrated in an identifiable decision-maker. In such configurations, accountability is preserved at the level of system design and oversight, while becoming increasingly detached from concrete decision outcomes.

Empirical research on citizen attitudes toward automated decision-making suggests that this responsibility gap is not only an analytical or institutional problem, but also a socially experienced one. Studies A. Kaun *et al.* (2024) showed that public trust in automated administrative decisions decreases when individuals cannot identify who is responsible for correcting errors or when meaningful avenues for appeal are absent. Across different administrative contexts, including Estonia, Sweden, and Germany, expectations of human intervention and contestability function as key markers of perceived fairness, indicating that the diffusion of responsibility in automated governance is directly reflected in patterns of public unease and distrust. This transformation is described by S. Zouridis *et al.* (2019) as a transition to system-level decision-making, in which the information system becomes the core of bureaucracy and decisions emerge as the result of continuous procedural production rather than a single act of will. Discretion does not disappear in this process, but is relocated from professional frontline officials to system designers, programmers, and data analysts who define the parameters of decision-making. This creates a structural gap between those who are affected by decisions and those who effectively shape their underlying. In regimes of risk governance, responsibility is transformed from an act of judgment into compliance with procedures and standards, where the criterion of adequacy becomes the correctness of execution rather than the substantive justification of the decision itself (Jasanoff, 2016).

Contemporary policy-oriented approaches to algorithmic governance attempt to address this diffusion of responsibility through the introduction of formal governance frameworks, ethical oversight mechanisms, and risk management procedures. For example, recent proposals for the governance of generative AI in the public sector, proposed by M. Esposito & T. Tse (2024), emphasise steering committees, accountability matrices, and procedural safeguards as means of ensuring “responsible” AI use. However, such frameworks primarily redistribute responsibility across institutional arrangements rather than re-establishing a clearly identifiable author of administrative decisions. Responsibility is thereby managed, documented, and audited, but not re-personalised.

This gap is further deepened by the opacity of algorithmic systems. The combination of technical complexity and legal secrecy makes it impossible to reconstruct the logic of a decision and, consequently, to identify a responsible subject or to effectively contest the outcome (Pasquale, 2015). At the same time, within the logic of algorithmic governmentality, decisions are increasingly

neither addressed to nor derived from a subject: they are based on statistical correlations and profiles rather than on the actions of concrete individuals (Rouvroy & Berns, 2013). From the perspective by A. Öjehag-Pettersson *et al.* (2024), this responsibility gap is therefore not an accidental failure or a case of malfunction, but a structural feature of governance through automated systems, in which accountability is institutionally affirmed yet practically elusive. Under such conditions, the responsibility gap emerges not as an accidental defect or a result of abuse, but as a structural property of automated governance, in which responsibility exists institutionally yet becomes practically unreachable.

Shift in political conflict under algorithmic governance

Under conditions of algorithmic governance, political conflict does not disappear but undergoes a profound transformation: it loses the form of an open value-based dispute and is translated into the technical language of models, data, and indicators. As A. Rouvroy & T. Berns (2013) demonstrated, algorithmic governmentality is grounded in statistical normativity, which is non-discursive in nature and does not rely on conventions of equivalence that traditionally enabled political contestation and compromise. Within such a regime, social and value-based normativities are not eliminated, but systematically neutralised, insofar as they resist digital translation and therefore cannot be incorporated into the algorithmic logic of decision-making. Importantly, this neutralisation operates not merely at the level of outcomes, but at the level of knowledge production itself: algorithmic systems privilege abstract, generalised, and decontextualised forms of knowing, thereby excluding situated and experiential forms of political claim-making that cannot be rendered legible within model-based representations (Maalsen, 2023).

This transformation of conflict is further reinforced by governance approaches that explicitly frame administrative decision-making as a technical process of data interpretation and system optimisation, within which disagreement is addressed not as a political claim but as an input to be managed or corrected. In such configurations, conflict is not denied but is rendered operationally irrelevant, insofar as it cannot be translated into parameters, indicators, or performance metrics within the decision-making architecture (Haitsma & Brink, 2025). Empirical research on citizen attitudes toward automated decision-making provides further evidence of this transformation of conflict. A. Kaun *et al.* (2024) showed that negative perceptions of automated governance – such as distrust, unease, or perceived unfairness – rarely translate into articulated political demands or collective contestation. Instead, across different administrative contexts, including Estonia, Sweden, and Germany, such reactions tend to remain individualised and affective, lacking a shared language through which they could be expressed as political claims. As a result, conflict persists at the level of experience, but does not enter the political arena as an object of deliberation or contestation.

This shift has a clear institutional foundation. As S. Jasanoff (2016) showed, in contemporary technocratic regimes of governance, questions concerning the permissibility of a given course of action – questions such as “should this be done at all?” – are formally acknowledged as political and value-laden, yet are deliberately excluded from procedures of technical risk assessment. As a result, the most fundamental conflicts are not resolved but are structurally excluded from decision-making processes. Technical procedures do not resolve value-based disagreements; rather, they circumvent them, leaving them outside the operational rationality of governance. From an epistemological perspective, this exclusion reflects a deeper asymmetry between what algorithmic systems can know and what political conflict requires to be articulated: while governance increasingly relies on scalable and standardised representations, political disagreement is rooted in context-dependent experiences that resist such abstraction (Maalsen, 2023). Under such conditions, political disagreement can manifest only in the form of technical critique. Questions of justice, legitimacy, or social harm are reduced to issues of model correctness: data quality, classification accuracy, the presence of bias, or compliance with performance indicators. As S. Jasanoff (2016) emphasised, quantification itself is an act of framing: assigning numerical values entails a choice regarding what counts as relevant and what is rendered secondary, and thus constitutes a politically charged decision. That which cannot be measured – such as experiences of exclusion, dignity, or social vulnerability – systematically falls outside the scope of decision-making, even when it is critically important for public welfare. As S. Maalsen (2023) argued, algorithmic harm emerges precisely at this point of epistemic mismatch, where lived experience and situational vulnerability are rendered invisible because they cannot be translated into the system’s dominant modes of representation.

As a consequence, negative outcomes or social harm do not become grounds for a political reconsideration of the system’s goals. As A. Rouvroy & T. Berns (2013) argued, errors and failures are interpreted not as challenges to legitimacy, but as misfires that call for further optimisation and reintegration into the model. Error does not call the system into question; instead, it is transformed into a resource for its improvement. In this logic, harm is not recognised as a signal of normative failure, but is reframed as a technical anomaly, reinforcing a governance regime in which political critique is systematically displaced by epistemic correction (Maalsen, 2023). In this logic, conflict is not resolved but absorbed by technical procedures of correction. The empirical dimension of this shift is clearly documented in secondary reviews of V. Eubanks’ work on automated welfare systems conducted by F. Gordon (2019) and J. Bevan (2020). These reviews highlight that appeal mechanisms in automated systems of social administration focus primarily on correcting individual data points or classifications, without opening space to contest the underlying logic of allocation, categorisation,

or risk profiling. Structural inequality is decomposed into a series of private technical errors, while public political debate over the system’s goals, values, and acceptable consequences is effectively absent. This pattern exemplifies what S. Maalsen (2023) described as the displacement of political claims into individualised sites of remediation, where harm is addressed case by case without recognition of its structural or epistemic origins.

This condition can be normatively specified as a form of domination rather than a mere governance failure. Drawing on a relational and egalitarian perspective, L. Naudts (2024) conceptualised data-driven decision-making systems as socio-technical arrangements that unjustifiably limit both self-determination and the capacity to contest collective goals, thereby transforming political disagreement into structurally inaudible claims. In such environments, individuals may encounter harm and exclusion without access to institutionalised channels capable of recognising these experiences as political grievances, rather than as isolated technical anomalies. This reduction of political conflict to technical remediation is further reinforced by contemporary governance frameworks for AI in the public sector. Policy-oriented approaches to algorithmic governance increasingly conceptualise disagreement and harm as risks to be mitigated through improved oversight, procedural safeguards, and system optimisation (Esposito & Tse, 2024). Within such frameworks, conflict is not articulated as a contestation of goals or distributive priorities, but as a problem of governance design, compliance, and risk management. Political antagonism is thus reframed as a managerial challenge, to be addressed through better coordination and control rather than through democratic confrontation. In epistemic terms, such frameworks treat harm as a failure of implementation rather than as evidence of contested values embedded in system design (Maalsen, 2023). What is displaced in this process is not conflict as such, but the possibility of democratic entry into the definition of system goals, priorities, and acceptable trade-offs.

In sum, conflict is not eliminated but deprived of the language through which it could be articulated as political. From a relational perspective, the absence of such language does not signal consensus but the persistence of unresolved domination, insofar as the conditions for articulating and contesting injustice are structurally foreclosed (Naudts, 2024). Algorithmic governance thus produces not a post-conflict order, but an epistemically constrained one, in which political antagonism persists while being systematically misrecognised as a technical problem (Maalsen, 2023). Technical disputes over data, indicators, or model accuracy function only as symptoms of a deeper unresolved value-based antagonism, which, under conditions of algorithmic governance, lacks a legitimate arena for public articulation (Jasanoff, 2016). As a result, political conflict persists not as an object of democratic deliberation, but as a residual and fragmented experience that cannot be collectively articulated or institutionally addressed. In this sense, algorithmic governance does not resolve

conflict but reorganises it into a technically mediated and politically muted form.

Shift in the visibility of the political

Studies by A. Öjehag-Pettersson *et al.* (2024) of automated and algorithmic governance increasingly emphasise that one of the key political effects of automation lies not in the elimination of political choice, but in its reduced visibility and altered modes of appearance. This reduced visibility should be understood not only as an institutional or communicative problem, but as an epistemological one, rooted in how algorithmic systems delimit what can count as relevant knowledge and, consequently, what can appear as political (Maalsen, 2023). Under conditions of algorithmic and data-driven governance, the political dimension of administrative decisions does not disappear but changes the form of its presence. Political choice increasingly ceases to appear as an explicit decision, a public justification, or an identifiable act of will. Instead, it becomes embedded in the formalised elements of governance systems – classification criteria, thresholds of acceptability, risk categories, data structures, and algorithmic models. It is precisely this infrastructural embeddedness that produces the effect of the invisibility of the political: not because choice is absent, but because it is no longer articulated as choice.

In the concept of algorithmic governmentality, A. Rouvroy & T. Berns (2013) proposed an ontology of governance in which the political is localised neither in the subject nor in the moment of decision. Governance operates not through addressing autonomous individuals, but through the management of statistical norms, correlations, and profiles – the so-called “statistical doubles”. In this regime, norms are not formulated as value-based prescriptions but appear to “emerge” directly from reality, insofar as knowledge is grounded not in causal explanation but in statistical relations. Normativity thus takes on the appearance of factuality and is perceived as immanent to reality itself rather than as the outcome of political choice. As a result, the political becomes difficult to detect: it dissolves into the organisation of the environment of action rather than appearing in the form of speech, argumentation, or decision. Maalsen’s concept of situated algorithmics clarifies this process by showing that such claims to objectivity depend on the exclusion of context-dependent perspectives, through which political meaning would otherwise become visible (Maalsen, 2023).

This logic does not eliminate the political, but systematically removes subjectivity from view. Data are presented as signals “purified” of interpretation, correlations as neutral relations, and algorithmic actions as the mere application of a profile to an environment. Governance increasingly operates not through prohibition or command, but through the subtle calibration of conditions under which certain behavioural trajectories become more probable while others become less accessible. Political choice in such a regime is neither declared nor justified; it operates through the environment, which guides conduct without addressing the

subject directly (Rouvroy & Berns, 2013). This transformation of political choice into an infrastructural condition is further reinforced in contemporary platform-based forms of algorithmic governance. Political decisions are increasingly perceived as technically necessary outputs of complex systems rather than as choices open to public justification. In such configurations, governance operates through environments and interfaces that structure conduct without rendering the underlying normative assumptions visible or contestable. The infrastructural dimension of this invisibility is analysed in detail by R. Kitchin (2014) in his work on data-driven governance. He demonstrates that political choice is localised not in the act of decision-making but in data infrastructures – specifically in practices of data collection, cleaning, categorisation, and modelling. Data do not merely represent reality; they actively participate in its construction, stabilising particular ways of seeing the world as technically necessary and self-evident. Once institutionalised, such classifications become difficult to contest, as they are perceived as infrastructural facts rather than as the outcomes of normative choice.

Whereas in A. Rouvroy’s account the invisibility of the political has an ontological character, in F. Pasquale’s (2015) work it acquires a clearly articulated institutional dimension. The concept of “black-box governance” demonstrates that opacity is not a byproduct of complexity but an actively maintained regime of power that combines technical complexity, legal secrecy, and deliberate obfuscation. Value judgments are embedded in coded rules, algorithms, and rankings that have significant distributive consequences yet remain inaccessible to understanding and contestation. The result is an asymmetric regime of visibility, which F. Pasquale described as a “one-way mirror”: power observes and evaluates, while itself remaining opaque. The political meaning of this invisibility becomes particularly clear when interpreted through the work of C. Mouffe (2005). If the political is understood as the dimension of antagonism and unavoidable exclusion, its invisibility does not entail the disappearance of conflict. Rather, it signals the loss of a legitimate form of articulation, as political decisions are presented as technical or expert-based rather than as objects of public choice. Antagonism does not vanish but is displaced beyond the democratic space, deprived of language, institutions, and an addressable audience to which claims can be directed. From an epistemological perspective, this displacement can be understood as a form of exclusion from intelligibility: political claims grounded in lived experience fail to register as meaningful within dominant algorithmic modes of knowing (Maalsen, 2023).

From the perspective of A. Öjehag-Pettersson *et al.* (2024), these ontological, infrastructural, and institutional mechanisms jointly contribute to a systematic depoliticisation-through-invisibility, in which political choice persists but becomes increasingly difficult to identify, articulate, and contest within democratic arenas. In this sense, formalisation functions not as a neutral instrument of



ordering but as a condition for the invisibility of the political. Political choice becomes less perceptible not because it no longer exists, but because it is translated into the form of standards, models, or infrastructures. The consequence is a growing difficulty of democratic control, a weakening of accountability, and a narrowing of the space for legitimate contestation. The political does not disappear – it ceases to appear as political, operating instead under the guise of technical necessity.

Why AI intensifies these shifts

Recent political studies increasingly conceptualise automated and AI-based governance not as a purely technical development, but as a transformation of political ordering itself, involving shifts in responsibility, visibility, legitimacy, and contestation (Öjehag-Pettersson *et al.*, 2024). Automation in public administration has long ceased to be synonymous with the simple execution of predefined rules. In the case of AI, a different mode is observed, in which automation combines large-scale data-based knowledge, prediction, and (partially) autonomous execution of administrative decisions. It is precisely this triad: Big Data → prediction → execution – that distinguishes AI from classical rule-based automation and creates the conditions for the radicalisation of structural shifts in the political dimension of governance (Fortes *et al.*, 2022). Unlike “if-then” models, in which norms are formally defined *ex ante*, in AI-based systems norms are increasingly derived from data and predictive models. Decisions rely not on the textual formulation of rules but on statistical assessments of probabilities, while their execution approaches semi-automatic or self-executing modes. In this configuration, governance functions not as a series of discrete decisions but as an environment that continuously generates knowledge and adjusts its own operations. This is what L. Diver (2021) described as algorithmic regulation – a regime of continual computational generation of knowledge from data with automatic refinement of system operations. From an epistemological perspective, this shift implies that governance increasingly operates through forms of knowledge that privilege generalisability, prediction, and scalability over situated judgment, thereby transforming how responsibility can be attributed.

Empirical studies by L. Haitsma & B. Brink (2025) further illustrated how this mode of governance reframes disagreement and intervention as technical matters of system performance rather than as sites of political judgment. In such settings, human involvement is primarily articulated in terms of system supervision or correction, while contestation is redirected toward the optimisation of processes instead of the articulation of competing values or goals. This transformation also entails a profound reconfiguration of human agency in governance. In such regimes, political and administrative power is exercised indirectly – through architectures, interfaces, and data-driven feedback loops – rather than through identifiable acts of will. Importantly, in this regime automation ceases to function as a neutral

auxiliary technique. Already at the level of defining automated decision-making, it is acknowledged that algorithmic systems may not only support but effectively replace human decision-making in public functions (Sever, 2023). The issue is therefore not the degree of automation, but a transformation in the very mode of norm production and the exercise of power. AI shifts governance into a data-driven, adaptive regime in which norm-setting, justification, and execution merge into a single infrastructure. It is this structural transformation that allows shifts in legitimation, responsibility, conflict, and the visibility of the political to become systemic and durable.

In AI-based algorithmic governance, the legitimation of administrative decisions increasingly relies less on public reason-giving and more on the epistemic authority of technical systems. Decisions are presented as outcomes of model architecture, datasets, and probabilistic outputs rather than as results of political deliberation among alternatives (Gritsenko & Wood, 2020; Diver, 2021). In this sense, algorithmic governance functions as a *de facto* design-based normative framework in which code and technical protocols determine norms and resource allocation without direct participation of democratic procedures. This shift in legitimation is accompanied by a transformation in the epistemological status of knowledge in governance. Instead of articulating reasons, values, and goals, decisions are increasingly justified by references to predictive accuracy, data scale, or the scientific objectivity of models. Political and normative complexity is thereby reduced to a cybernetic logic of optimisation, within which decisions appear technically necessary rather than politically chosen (Diver, 2021).

Normative assumptions in this regime do not become objects of public debate but are embedded directly in the technical architecture of systems – through the selection of variables, thresholds, metrics, and objective functions. Legitimation thus increasingly bypasses open discourse and is realised through infrastructures perceived as neutral and objective. In broader political terms, this corresponds to an understanding of technologies as forms of social ordering capable of shaping conditions of action and distributions of opportunity beyond explicit political processes (Koenig, 2025). As a result, the legitimation of administrative decisions in AI-based regimes effectively “moves” from the public sphere into models, data, and predictions, while appeals to the system’s epistemic superiority (“the model shows”) become a new formula of administrative authority (Fortes *et al.*, 2022). Political choice does not disappear in this configuration, but it loses its visibility as a choice subject to public justification and contestation.

One of the key effects of introducing AI into public administration is the radicalisation of the shift in responsibility. Unlike classical automation, where decisions can still be localised in institutionally defined acts, AI-based algorithmic systems fragment decision-making processes across data, models, optimisation parameters, and execution infrastructures. As a result, responsibility ceases to be

linked to a concrete subject and increasingly dissolves into system design and its technical preconditions (Fortes *et al.*, 2022). This diffusion of responsibility is reinforced epistemologically by the framing of algorithmic outcomes as data-driven inferences rather than as discretionary judgments, which weakens the grounds on which responsibility can be claimed, contested, or assigned (Maalsen, 2023).

This effect is particularly pronounced in regimes of algorithmic regulation, where no identifiable human author of the decision exists. Instead of reason-giving that allows for normative justification and political contestation, decision recipients encounter technical explanations that neither reconstruct the logic of choice nor allow the system's goals themselves to be questioned. According to L. Diver (2021), the loss of an identifiable responsible subject and the reduction of participation and contestability are systemic features of this governance regime. The administrative-practical dimension of this problem is well illustrated by the distinction between formal and substantive ADM. In the former case, decisions are fully automated and made without human judgment; in the latter, algorithms formally support human actors but effectively determine the boundaries of acceptable decisions (Sever, 2023). Even where a "human in the loop" exists, authorship may be fictitious, as the human role is reduced to confirming system outputs. This effect is further reinforced by automation bias and the "black box" problem, which make critical evaluation of algorithmic decisions institutionally difficult.

Empirical clarity to this shift is provided by the case of algorithmic profiling of job seekers in Austria described by D. Allhutter *et al.* (2020). In this system, classification decisions are not made by individual officials but emerge from a predictive model scaled across the entire user population. Employment service staff are required to rely on profiling outcomes but are not the authors of the decisions, resulting in the diffusion of responsibility across models, data, and organisational architecture. From the perspective of algorithmic epistemologies, such cases illustrate how harm and exclusion can occur without producing a corresponding locus of responsibility, as outcomes are attributed to model behaviour rather than to political or administrative choice (Maalsen, 2023). The opacity of criteria and the lack of effective appeal mechanisms further remove political choice from the public sphere.

AI also intensifies the shift in political conflict. Instead of open clashes of values, disputes are increasingly reduced to technical critiques – of data quality, predictive accuracy, or bias. Political choice does not disappear in this regime, but it loses its own language and is masked as technical necessity (Fortes *et al.*, 2022). Criticism is articulated in terms of accuracy, performance, or explainability, creating an illusion of neutrality while displacing questions of goals and justice to the periphery of governance discourse. This effect is particularly evident in the Austrian job-seeker profiling case, where austerity policies are implemented through optimisation criteria and statistical models. Social decisions are presented as neutral outcomes of data processing, while

any critique of the system is reduced to technical parameters rather than debates over normative policy priorities (Allhutter *et al.*, 2020). In this sense, AI radicalises the shift in the visibility of the political. Normative decisions are increasingly enacted not through laws, debates, or administrative acts, but through system architectures and algorithmic environments that shape conditions of action without explicit political articulation. Technologies thus function as instruments of social ordering, influencing behaviour and opportunity distributions without naming themselves as politics. Taken together, these dynamics correspond to what A. Öjehag-Pettersson *et al.* (2024) described as a re-configuration of governance through automated systems, in which responsibility, visibility, and democratic contestation are systematically displaced from the public sphere into socio-technical infrastructures.

In conclusion, AI does not eliminate the political dimension of administrative decisions but relocates it into an infrastructural domain. Political choice is not abolished but embedded in code, models, and data; conflict is not resolved but masked as a technical problem. Responsibility, in turn, is neither denied nor assumed, but rendered structurally elusive – distributed across epistemic assumptions, system architectures, and predictive logics that resist political attribution. For this reason, AI-based automation constitutes a new regime of politicality – less visible, less localised, and significantly more difficult to subject to democratic control and public contestation.

■ Conclusions

This article demonstrated that automation in public administration transforms the political dimension of decision-making structurally rather than eliminating it. Politicality is relocated from the immediate moment of decision-making to the *ex ante* design of procedures, models, and infrastructures. Technical analysis of automation is insufficient, as it fails to reveal where political choice is produced. Automation shifts political power from visible acts of judgment to durable, less perceptible system-level arrangements. The analytical framework based on "points of shift" allows this transformation to be systematically captured in governance structures. The shift in legitimation shows how public justification is replaced by the procedural and technical authority of procedures, metrics, and algorithms. The shift in responsibility reveals a structural diffusion of authorship as responsibility can no longer be localised in individual judgment but is distributed across system components. The shift in conflict demonstrates how political disagreements are translated into technical disputes over model correctness and data quality, thereby losing their capacity for value-based articulation. Finally, the shift in the visibility of the political highlights how normative assumptions are embedded in governance infrastructures and withdrawn from explicit political articulation.

AI-based systems radicalise these shifts by creating an adaptive and self-correcting mode of governance. In this configuration, norms derive from data and statistical

models rather than predefined rules; justification is reduced to the epistemic superiority of the system; and execution approaches infrastructural automatism. This makes political choice less visible but more stable and scalable. The findings of this study supported a broader theoretical claim that the problem of automation transcends the replacement of humans by machines. It concerns a transformation in how power is exercised, where decisions appear as effects of system-level processes rather than identifiable acts of choice. In this sense, AI-driven automation reconfigures politicality into a regime less localised, less personalised, and more resistant to democratic control.

At the same time, the analysis exposed unresolved conceptual tensions requiring further theoretical development. First, contemporary approaches regulating automated systems focus primarily on procedural safeguards – transparency, explainability, accountability, and human oversight. While necessary, they often remain blind to the political dimension of system-level design choices, including the selection of goals, metrics, categories, and models that shape administrative decisions prior to formal adoption. This creates a risk of regulatory reductionism, whereby the politicality of automation is excluded from legal and democratic

analysis. Second, automated governance renders classical distinctions – between “tools” and “decisions”, “support” and “replacement”, or “human-in-the-loop” – analytically insufficient. These categories obscure how power is exercised through infrastructural arrangements through which norms, categories, and outcomes are stabilised.

This framework provides a basis for further research into the politicality of automated governance as a form of social ordering. Future studies must analyse political choice at the level of system design and epistemic authority. Understanding automation as a transformation – rather than elimination – of the political is a precondition for advancing regulatory approaches and democratic oversight in the age of AI.

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Політичний вимір прийняття адміністративних рішень в умовах автоматизації: структурні зрушення в публічному управлінні

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■ **Анотація.** Стаття мала на меті пояснити, яким чином автоматизація структурно трансформує політичний вимір прийняття адміністративних рішень у публічному управлінні. Замість того щоб розглядати автоматизацію як суто технічну або організаційну інновацію, у дослідженні вона концептуалізована як управлінська практика, що перерозподіляє судження, відповідальність і легітимність у межах адміністративних систем. Спираючись на сучасні теорії бюрократії та алгоритмічного врядування, у статті обґрунтовано тезу про те, що автоматизація не усуває політичний вибір, а зміщує його з моменту індивідуального прийняття рішень до етапу проєктування процедур, моделей та інфраструктур, які наперед визначають можливі результати управління. Для аналітичного осмислення цієї трансформації у статті запропоновано концепт «точок зсуву», через які автоматизація змінює політичний вимір прийняття рішень. Виокремлено чотири такі зсуви: зсув легітимації від публічного обґрунтування до технічного авторитету; зсув відповідальності від індивідуального судження до архітектури систем; трансформацію політичного конфлікту в технічну критику; а також зростання невидимості політичного вибору внаслідок його інфраструктурного закріплення. Особливу увагу приділено тому, чому саме штучний інтелект (ШІ) інтенсифікує ці зсуви. На відміну від автоматизації заснованої на правилах, системи ШІ поєднують вироблення знань на основі даних, прогнозування та напів автономне виконання, формуючи адаптивні й масштабовані режими управління, у яких нормативні припущення вбудовуються в моделі, а не артикулюються через політичні процеси. У статті зроблено висновок, що автоматизація – особливо заснована на ШІ – не деполітизує публічне управління, а формує новий режим політичної упорядкованості, який є менш видимим, менш локалізованим і значно більш стійким до демократичного контролю. Отримані результати мають практичне значення для політиків, регуляторів і публічних адміністраторів, оскільки вони демонструють, яким чином політичні вибори вбудовуються в дизайн систем та інфраструктурні рішення, сприяючи формуванню більш рефлексивних підходів до регулювання й нагляду за автоматизованим прийняттям рішень

■ **Ключові слова:** штучний інтелект; політичний вимір врядування; алгоритмічне врядування; відповідальність; легітимність; політичність; процедурна раціональність