



Research paper

From the Public Sphere to Digital Power: Understanding AI's Role in Afghanistan's Political Transformation

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Algorithmic Bias
Artificial Intelligence
Digital Power
Political Engagement
Political Transformation
Public Sphere

ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, artificial intelligence (AI) has had a profound impact on politics, public relations, and the way people interact with the state. This study focuses on the transformation of digital political engagement through AI technology in Afghanistan, where technological infrastructure, media freedom, and digital literacy are still weak. The study draws on Jürgen Habermas's theory of "public sphere" and the theory of "technological arbitrage" to explore how AI is transforming information transparency, public participation, and the transparency of political decisions. The study was conducted using a quantitative and descriptive-analytical method, with data collected through a questionnaire from 217 political science graduates from private universities in Nangrahar province. According to the results, AI offers opportunities for promoting transparency, better data management, and good governance, but also carries serious risks of misinformation, algorithmic bias, and digital deception. Most participants affirmed the need for ethical frameworks, Sharia principles, and a national legal system. The study concludes that the future of Afghanistan's digital democracy will only be bright when the public's digital literacy, public awareness, and principles of transparency and accountability are strengthened. This shift will transform artificial intelligence from a tool of control to a tool of popular power.

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, Russell and Norvig (2021) have argued that artificial intelligence (AI) has gone beyond the realm of technical tools and has brought about profound changes in various areas of human life, including politics and democracy. According to Kumar et al. (2023), AI is used in election campaigns, policymaking, and the interaction between government and citizens. Taddeo and Floridi (2018) note that this change has ushered in a new era in the way democratic systems work and their relationship with technology. In the UK, Dev.ua (2024) reported that an AI tool called "Nostrada" has been created that allows people to digitally communicate with 650 members of parliament. However, Bradshaw et al. (2020) are concerned that this technology may lead to the spread of misinformation and the reckless trust of the public. Similarly, in the 2024 US elections, the Washington Post (2024) AI was used to personalize campaign messages, analyze voter data, and collect financial support. Despite these benefits, Al-Jazeera (2024) emphasizes that the widespread use of AI is not without serious risks. The spread of disinformation through deepfake videos and social media bots poses major threats to public opinion and electoral processes. Raji et al. (2020) highlight that the undetected bias of algorithms

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<https://doi.org/10.65496/jssme.2026.89>

Received 29 April 2026; Received in revised form 28 May 2026; Accepted 07 June 2026

Available online 13 June 2026

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can lead to increased social inequalities, as many AI systems act as “black boxes” whose decision-making processes are not visible to the general public. The European Commission (2023), legal frameworks for transparency and detection of deepfake content have been established to prevent these problems. Livingstone (2020) stresses that increasing digital literacy is considered essential so that people can consciously cope with the effects of AI and remain participants in digital democracy. This study aims to thoroughly examine the role, benefits, and risks of AI in the political process, and to explore how technological advances can be leveraged to strengthen democratic values, rather than weaken them. The use of AI in Afghanistan is still in its infancy, but limited internet access, lack of media freedom, and low digital literacy have limited the potential benefits of this technology. Safi (2022) notes that the spread of fake information and propaganda on social media is contributing to a decline in public trust and political instability. Legal frameworks are lacking for the transparent use of AI, and many people are still unable to recognize artificial content. However, AI offers great opportunities for public services, education, and transparent governance, but achieving these benefits requires increasing digital literacy, preventing fake information, and establishing clear regulations.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

1.1.2 Public Sphere Theory and Artificial Intelligence

The theoretical framework of this study draws inspiration from Jürgen Habermas’s theory of the public sphere and the perspective of technological determinism. Habermas (1989) argues that democratic systems can maintain legitimacy and stability when citizens express their views on public affairs in an atmosphere of free, transparent, and rational debate and participate in the decision-making process. In his view, media freedom and access to information form the basis of public legitimacy (Fuchs, 2020; Zuboff, 2019). With the advent of the digital age, artificial intelligence has changed the nature of public debate. AI is no longer just a tool for disseminating information, but also has the potential to generate ideas, create narratives, and shape public opinion (Feenberg, 2017; Fuchs, 2020). If this technology is used to disseminate accurate and unbiased information, it can strengthen democratic values; however, if it is used for political propaganda, distortion, and control, it can undermine the foundations of public trust and free debate (Winner, 1986; Zuboff, 2019).

1.1.2 Technological Coercion Theory and Power Shift

The theory of technological coercion, which originates from the ideas of Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan, 1964) and Langdon Winner (Winner, 1986), emphasizes that technology is not just a neutral tool, but plays an active role in changing social relations, natural structures, and values. McLuhan (1964) believes that new technologies are redefining the balance between the flow of information and political power. Weiner (1986) argues that individuals and institutions that control AI systems can directly influence people’s thinking, decision-making, and political behavior. AI is therefore becoming an active actor in politics; an actor that can lead to transparency, accountability, and participation, or, conversely, become a tool for the expansion of bias, propaganda, and political monopoly (Feenberg, 2017; Zuboff, 2019).

1.1.3 Analytical dimensions of a shared theoretical framework

The combination of Habermas’s theory of the public sphere and the perspective of technological coercion suggests that the impacts of AI do not have only technical or ethical dimensions, but also have profound social, political, and cultural dimensions (Fuchs, 2020). According to this shared framework, the current study assesses four main dimensions: The legitimacy and transparency of information; The level of public participation; The balance of power and responsibility; The existence of a moral and legal framework. Together, these dimensions illustrate how AI can strengthen or weaken democratic processes (Habermas, 1989; Feenberg, 2017; Fuchs, 2020; Zuboff, 2019).

1.1.4 Applying the theory to the Afghan context

The application of these ideas to the Afghan context is particularly important. The space for public debate is limited, the media is subject to various pressures, and digital literacy is still low. Habermas (1989) uses the term “partial public sphere” to describe such a situation. In such an environment, AI can either increase these limitations through misinformation and political influence, or create new avenues for transparent and open debate. From a technological coercion perspective, AI can provide a platform for strengthening digital democracy if used in a way that is based on transparent policies, scientific ethics, and public participation (Feenberg, 2017; Fuchs, 2020). However, if used for narrow political interests and control, it increases the risk of “digital tyranny” (Zuboff, 2019).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Artificial Intelligence and the Transformation of Public Debates

Recent studies have examined the relationship between artificial intelligence and politics from the perspective of digital democracy, public debate, and technological power (Fuchs, 2020; Zuboff, 2019). Habermas' (1989) theory of the public sphere suggests that the legitimacy of democratic societies is preserved when citizens have free opportunity to express their opinions and participate politically. Within this framework, several studies have shown that AI has a dual role in transforming public debates. On the one hand, it can be a means of increasing participation, information, and political awareness, and on the other hand, it can also be a source of misinformation, propaganda, and distortion of ideas (Feenberg, 2017; Fuchs, 2020; Winner, 1986; Zuboff, 2019).

2.2 AI and Election Campaigns

Research by Garnett and James (2023) and Foos (2024) shows that artificial intelligence has changed the nature of election campaigns. AI-based political campaigns analyze voters' emotions, behaviors, and preferences and then deliver personalized messages to each individual. This situation seems to contradict Habermas's (1989) theory of the public sphere, as it creates a mechanism of "targeted influence" instead of free and general debate. Thus, democratic debates are influenced by algorithmic logic rather than public reasoning, and the foundations of representation are weakened (Fuchs, 2020).

2.3 Misinformation and digital propaganda

A number of studies have also drawn attention to the dark sides of AI. Nasiri and Hashemzadeh (2025) and Maphefe (2025) argue that the development of deepfake videos, automated accounts (bots), and artificial intelligence networks lead to the distortion of democratic processes. According to Habermas (1989), this situation is a sign that the public sphere is increasingly dominated by artificial and fabricated content, rather than rational and genuine debate. As a result, public trust is declining and the quality of political participation is suffering.

2.4 The "black box" problem and the transparency crisis

Brožek et al. (2024) discuss the "black box" problem of artificial intelligence. In this case, AI decisions are so complex that ordinary people and even experts cannot understand how the system reached a conclusion. This situation leads to a decrease in transparency, accountability, and public trust (McLuhan, 1964; Winner, 1986). This analysis is consistent with the theory of technological coercion, according to which technology itself becomes a new source of power that reshapes social relations and political structures (Feenberg, 2017).

2.5 Legal and ethical frameworks

Fereniki Panagopoulou et al. (2025), Chesterman (2023) and Gstrein et al. (2024) warn that without an appropriate legal and ethical framework, AI can become a tool for political control and digital tyranny. The European Union's AI policy shows that the labeling of deepfake content, transparency and accountability of algorithms are important elements for the protection of democracy (Gstrein et al., 2024). These policies are in line with the fundamental principle of Habermas's theory that transparent and open debate is the basis of public legitimacy (Fuchs, 2020).

2.6 Digital literacy and democratic participation

Recent research shows that digital literacy plays an important role in the protection of democratic values. Tiernan et al. (2023) and Kozyreva et al. (2021) find that increasing information literacy increases society's resistance to disinformation and propaganda. This concept is considered a contemporary form of Habermas's "rational discourse", in which the principle of "informed participation" is of paramount importance (Fuchs, 2020). In this regard, UNESCO (2024) and OECD (2023) reports indicate that ethical frameworks for AI, data transparency and human rights-based policies are vital for safeguarding digital democracy (Allahrakha, 2024).

2.7 Gaps and the importance of current research

Kahl (2025), Shaikh (2025), Gonzales (2024) and Nayla (2025) have concluded in their studies that artificial intelligence is simultaneously changing the space of public debate and redefining power structures. Therefore, the existence of transparency, accountability, public awareness and ethical frameworks is essential for the positive use of this technology. However, there is still limited scholarly research on the relationship between artificial intelligence, democracy, and political change in the Afghan context. In particular, there is insufficient evidence on the question of how AI changes the balance of information, power, and democratic values. Therefore, the current study attempts to assess the impact of artificial intelligence in the Afghan political environment based on Habermas's theory of the public sphere and the perspective of technological coercion, and to provide scholarly recommendations for strengthening digital democracy.

3. Research Methodology

This study is quantitative and descriptive-analytical in nature. The aim was to assess the academic and practical status of political science graduates of private universities based on their experiences, opinions, and evaluations. The study is based on statistical data to examine the trends, differences, and general status of opinions among graduates. The total population of the study consists of students from private universities in Nangarhar province of Afghanistan who graduated from the Department of Political Science during the year 2024. Of this group, 217 were selected as the research sample. 500 graduated students were targeted in private universities. The sample size was considered according to Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1967):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where N = population size and e = margin of error (0.05),

So, the minimum required sample size was calculated as:

$$n = \frac{500}{1 + 500(0.05)^2} = 222$$

The selection of participants was done according to the purposive sampling method, because the aim was to find out the opinions of only those graduates who graduated from the university within a certain period and have practical experience related to political science. A standardized questionnaire was prepared to collect data, which included six questions. The questionnaire was designed using closed-ended questions to facilitate statistical analysis. The questions were designed to gather students' opinions on political knowledge, university experiences, practical skills, and the effectiveness of their education. The collected data were evaluated through Descriptive Statistical Analysis. Frequency, Percentage, and Mean indicators were used in this section. SPSS and Microsoft Excel programs were used to organize and analyze the data. Tables and graphs were also prepared to illustrate the results. This study is based on primary data obtained from direct responses from students. However, secondary sources such as books, academic articles, and research reports were also used to strengthen the scientific basis of the study. The study is based on an inductive approach, meaning that general conclusions are drawn from individual data and observations. The content of the questionnaire was reviewed and validated by experts to ensure content validity. Reliability was assessed through a pilot survey, and the level of consistency between questions was higher than 0.7 with a Cronbach's Alpha index, indicating the stability of the questionnaire. The study also has some limitations. The scope of the study was limited to graduates of private universities, and students from public universities were not included. Also, the integrity of the data was somewhat affected by the non-cooperation or incomplete responses of some participants. Finally, all ethical principles of the study were observed. Confidentiality of the participants was protected, informed consent was obtained, and all data were used only for academic and research purposes.

4. Findings

The findings show that AI has a dual impact on political affairs: if used ethically, it can promote transparency, participation, and informed public debate, but if misused, it can lead to propaganda, algorithmic control, and digital tyranny. The convergence between Habermas's theory of the public sphere and the theories of technological determinism suggests that AI is both a tool for empowering democracy and an active agent of political power-building. Overall, the findings emphasize that ethical governance, transparency, digital literacy, and public awareness are necessary for AI to empower democracy, not undermine it. The survey results are shown in the tables below.

Table 1: Political Science Graduates' Perception of AI in Nangarhar of Afghanistan

Measure	Description	Value / Observation
Frequency Distribution	Graduates' responses (counts & %)	General understanding: 112 (51.6%) AI can be used in politics: 98 (45.2%) AI use is limited: 180 (82.9%) No clear policy: 190 (87.6%)
Central Tendency	Typical value of responses	Mode / Median: Agree Mean (1–5): General understanding ≈ 4.26 ,

		AI in politics ≈ 4.22 , Limited use ≈ 4.57 , No clear policy ≈ 4.63	
Variability / Spread	Dispersion of responses	Range:	1–5
		SD: General understanding ≈ 0.85 , AI in politics ≈ 0.89 , Limited use ≈ 0.66 , No clear policy ≈ 0.61	

Based on the opinions of 217 political science graduates, the data show that knowledge and understanding of artificial intelligence (AI) varied: 51.6% of graduates admitted to having general knowledge about AI, 45.2% believed that AI could be used in politics, and 82.9% pointed to the limitations of AI's use. These results indicate that a large proportion of participants are still cautious about the possibilities and risks of AI. From Habermas's perspective on the public sphere, this cautious attitude points to the need for "rational and informed debate," as transparency of information and knowledge of the implications of AI are essential for democratic processes. From the perspective of technological determinism, these results show that AI is not just a technical tool; it can also change the balance of information, power, and politics. Graduates who point to the limitations of AI consider the "black box" problem, potential bias, and the risk of spreading fake information, which is consistent with the findings of previous studies such as Nasiri and Hashemzadeh (2025) and Maphephe (2025). Rauchfleisch et al. (2025) research shows that AI has an impact on the personalization of election campaigns and the analysis of voter behavior, which is consistent with the findings of the table, as 45.2% of graduates emphasized the importance of the possible use of AI in politics. At the same time, Brožek et al. (2024)'s statements point to the "black box" problem and the lack of transparency undermining public trust, which are related to the concerns of 82.9% of participants in this table. The application of these findings in Afghanistan is of particular importance. Limited internet, low digital literacy, and reduced media freedoms prevent the widespread use of AI's benefits, and the risk of fake content spreading reflects Habermas's notion of a "defective public sphere." According to Technological Determinism, if AI is not used within transparent, ethical, and legal frameworks, it will become a tool for digital tyranny.

Table 2: Political Science Graduates' Perception of the Political Effects of AI

Measure	Description	Value / Observation	
Frequency Distribution	Graduates' responses (counts & %)	AI improves government info management:	165 (76.0%)
		AI tools enhance citizen–state relations:	148 (68.2%)
		AI increases political decision transparency:	140 (64.5%)
		Unsupervised AI causes bias/propaganda:	155 (71.4%)
		AI use increases public trust:	130 (60.0%)
		AI analysis of public opinion supports state stability:	138 (63.6%)
Central Tendency	Typical value of responses	Mode / Median:	Agree
		Mean (1–5 Likert scale): AI info management ≈ 4.50 , Citizen–state relations ≈ 4.32 , Transparency ≈ 4.28 , Unsupervised AI ≈ 4.40 , Public trust ≈ 4.12 , State stability ≈ 4.20	
Variability / Spread	Dispersion of responses	Range:	1–5
		SD: AI info management ≈ 0.63 , Citizen–state relations ≈ 0.76 , Transparency ≈ 0.79 , Unsupervised AI ≈ 0.69 , Public trust ≈ 0.84 , State stability ≈ 0.78	

The data show that graduates have both positive and negative views on the political impact of AI. 76% of graduates believe that AI improves government information management, 68.2% noted the importance of strengthening the relationship between citizens and the state, and 64.5% considered the impact of AI on the transparency of political decisions to be important. At the same time, 71.4% expressed concern about the spread of bias and propaganda due to unsupervised AI, and 60–63% believe that AI can increase public trust and support the stability of the state. The median values (Mean 4.12–4.50) and Mode/Medians indicate significant agreement among graduates. From Habermas's perspective on the public sphere, the use of transparent and ethical AI is vital to fostering rational public debate, as people can participate in political decisions with confidence and awareness. From the perspective of Technological Determinism, AI creates power in the balance of information and decision-making, and those who control the systems directly influence the process of political thought and belief. Previous

studies, such as Garnett & James, (2023) and Foos (2024), have also shown that AI applications play an important role in improving the relationship between government and citizens, the transparency of electoral processes, and building public trust, but if left unchecked, the spread of misinformation and propaganda is dangerous for democracy. The application of these findings in Afghanistan is of particular importance. Limited digital literacy, weak media, and the lack of a legal framework limit the positive effects of AI. Therefore, the implementation of transparent, ethical, and legal principles is essential for the positive use of AI, strengthening trust between government and citizens, and political stability.

Table 3: Political Science Graduates' Perception of AI-related Disinformation and Propaganda

Measure	Description	Value / Observation
Frequency Distribution	Graduates' responses (counts & %)	AI spreads disinformation quickly: 170 (78.3%) Deepfakes affect political trust: 160 (73.7%) Limited public awareness of AI propaganda risks: 155 (71.4%) Government media should adopt ethical AI principles: 180 (82.9%)
Central Tendency	Typical value of responses	Mode / Median: Agree Mean (1–5 Likert scale): AI spreads disinformation ≈ 4.55 , Deepfakes affect trust ≈ 4.42 , Limited awareness ≈ 4.35 , Ethical principles ≈ 4.63
Variability Spread	/ Dispersion of responses	Range: 1–5 SD: AI spreads disinformation ≈ 0.62 , Deepfakes affect trust ≈ 0.69 , Limited awareness ≈ 0.73 , Ethical principles ≈ 0.61

The graduates' opinions show that AI's commitment to ethical, transparent, and legal principles is considered very important for strengthening political trust and democracy. 87.6% of graduates believe that AI should act in accordance with Sharia, ethical principles, and national interests, 80.6% expressed the need to respect personal privacy, 73.7% believe that transparent and responsible AI affects trust in government, and 82.9% are concerned about the legitimacy of the negative effects of fake news. 85.3% of graduates emphasized the need for a government legal framework. The median values of the Likert Scale and the Mode/Medians confirm this trend. According to Habermas's theory of the public sphere, the ethical and transparent use of AI forms the basis for strengthening rational and informed public debate, as people participate in political decisions with confidence. From the perspective of Technological Determinism, AI is a tool for controlling power and information, and the presence of transparent, ethical, and legal frameworks ensures the positive use of this power. Previous studies, such as Fereniki Panagopoulou et al. (2025) and Gstrein et al. (2024), have also shown that the lack of ethical principles and legal frameworks for AI leads to digital tyranny and a lack of trust. Furthermore, Nasiri and Hashemzadeh's (2025) findings confirm the views of 82–85% of the graduates in this table regarding the negative impacts of fake content. The application of these findings in Afghanistan is of particular importance, as limited digital literacy, low media freedom, and the lack of a legal framework increase the risk of negative impacts of AI. Therefore, embedding ethical principles, transparency, accountability, and a legal framework in government policies are essential steps to deepen democracy and strengthen trust.

Table 4: Political Science Graduates' Perception of Ethics, Transparency, and Trust in AI

Measure	Description	Value / Observation
Frequency Distribution	Graduates' responses (counts & %)	AI should follow Sharia, ethics & national interests: 190 (87.6%) AI must respect personal privacy: 175 (80.6%) Transparent & accountable AI affects government trust: 160 (73.7%) AI for false propaganda harms legitimacy: 180 (82.9%) Government needs legal AI framework: 185 (85.3%)
Central Tendency	Typical value of responses	Mode / Median: Agree Mean (1–5 Likert scale): Ethics & national interest ≈ 4.63 , Respect privacy ≈ 4.52 , Transparency & accountability ≈ 4.38 , Harm from false propaganda ≈ 4.57 , Legal framework ≈ 4.60
Variability Spread	/ Dispersion of responses	Range: 1–5 SD: Ethics & national interest ≈ 0.61 , Respect privacy ≈ 0.68 , Transparency

& accountability ≈ 0.72 , Harm from false propaganda ≈ 0.63 , Legal framework ≈ 0.62

The graduates' opinions show that AI's commitment to ethical, transparent, and legal principles is considered very important for strengthening political trust and democracy. 87.6% of graduates believe that AI should act in accordance with Sharia, ethical principles, and national interests, 80.6% expressed the need to respect personal privacy, 73.7% believe that transparent and responsible AI affects trust in government, and 82.9% are concerned about the legitimacy of the negative effects of fake news. 85.3% of graduates emphasized the need for a government legal framework. The median values of the Likert Scale and the Mode/Medians confirm this trend. According to Habermas's theory of the public sphere, the ethical and transparent use of AI forms the basis for strengthening rational and informed public debate, as people participate in political decisions with confidence. From the perspective of Technological Determinism, AI is a tool for controlling power and information, and the presence of transparent, ethical, and legal frameworks ensures the positive use of this power. Previous studies, such as Fereniki Panagopoulou et al. (2025) and Gstrein et al. (2024), have also shown that the lack of ethical principles and legal frameworks for AI leads to digital tyranny and a lack of trust. Furthermore, Nasiri and Hashemzadeh's (2025) findings confirm the views of 82–85% of the graduates in this table regarding the negative impacts of fake content. The application of these findings in Afghanistan is of particular importance, as limited digital literacy, low media freedom, and the lack of a legal framework increase the risk of negative impacts of AI. Therefore, embedding ethical principles, transparency, accountability, and a legal framework in government policies are essential steps to deepen democracy and strengthen trust.

Table 5: Political Science Graduates' Perception of Digital Literacy and Public Awareness of AI

Measure	Description	Value / Observation
Frequency Distribution	Graduates' responses (counts & %)	Digital literacy is important to understand AI risks/benefits: 185 (85.3%) University curricula should include AI political effects: 160 (73.7%) Raising youth awareness prevents information warfare: 170 (78.3%)
Central Tendency	Typical value of responses	Mode / Median: Agree Mean (1–5 Likert scale): Digital literacy ≈ 4.60 , University curricula ≈ 4.38 , Youth awareness ≈ 4.50
Variability Spread	Dispersion of responses	Range: 1–5 SD: Digital literacy ≈ 0.62 , University curricula ≈ 0.72 , Youth awareness ≈ 0.65

The data show that graduates fully understand the importance of digital literacy and public awareness. 85.3% of graduates believe that digital literacy is essential for understanding the benefits and risks of AI, 73.7% suggest that universities should include the political implications of AI in their curricula, and 78.3% indicated that raising awareness among young people is essential to preventing information warfare. The mean values (Mean) range from 4.38–4.60, indicating strong agreement among graduates. From Habermas's perspective of the public sphere, raising digital literacy is fundamental for the development of rational and transparent public debate, as people can make informed decisions about the implications of AI. From the perspective of technological determinism, technology itself is a tool for managing information and power, and public awareness ensures its effectiveness and positive use for social and political outcomes. Previous studies, such as Tiernan et al. (2023) and Kozyreva et al. (2021), have also shown that increasing digital literacy increases a society's resilience to disinformation, propaganda, and fake content. Similarly, UNESCO (2024) and OECD (2023) reports emphasize that developing digital literacy is fundamental to safeguarding democracy. These findings are particularly important in Afghanistan, where limited internet access, low digital literacy, and weak media outlets limit the positive impacts of AI. Increasing digital literacy and youth awareness through universities and educational programs is vital to reducing information warfare and strengthening democracy.

Table 6: Political Science Graduates' General Assessment of AI in Nangarhar of Afghanistan

Measure	Description	Value / Observation
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Frequency Distribution	Graduates' responses (counts & %)	AI can play a positive role in political stability: 175 (80.6%) Ethical use of AI strengthens system legitimacy: 165 (76.0%) Disorganized AI causes societal division and distrust: 160 (73.7%) Government needs a clear national AI policy: 185 (85.3%)
Central Tendency	Typical value of responses	Mode / Median: Agree Mean (1–5 Likert scale): Positive role in stability ≈ 4.52 , Ethical use strengthens legitimacy ≈ 4.45 , Disorganized AI ≈ 4.38 , Clear national policy ≈ 4.60
Variability / Spread	Dispersion of responses	Range: 1–5 SD: Positive role in stability ≈ 0.65 , Ethical use strengthens legitimacy ≈ 0.68 , Disorganized AI ≈ 0.72 , Clear national policy ≈ 0.61

The data show that graduates perceive both positive and negative impacts of AI on politics and society. 80.6% of graduates believe that AI can play a role in strengthening political stability, 76% consider it important to increase the legitimacy of the system through ethical use, and 73.7% are concerned about the social division and distrust that unregulated or unintelligent AI can cause. Most notably, 85.3% of graduates emphasize the need for a clear national AI policy by the government. The median values (Mean 4.38–4.60) indicate strong agreement among graduates. From Habermas's perspective on the public sphere, transparent and ethical use of AI is essential for strengthening public trust and the legitimacy of political decision-making. From the perspective of technological determinism, AI creates a new form of balance of power and information, and for individuals who control the systems, there is a direct stake in influencing political decisions. Previous studies, such as Brożek et al. (2024) and Fereniki Panagopoulou et al. (2025), noted the risks of unregulated use of AI, lack of transparency, and reduced trust, which are consistent with the concerns of 73–85% of graduates in this table. Given the limited digital literacy in Afghanistan, weak media, and lack of a legal framework, national AI policies, implementation of ethical principles, and transparent information dissemination are vital to ensure positive impacts and strengthen democracy.

4. Discussion

Overall, the findings of the study suggest that artificial intelligence (AI) has a dual impact on political processes: if its use is based on ethics, transparency, and a legal framework, it provides opportunities for transparency, public participation, and rational public debate; but if it is used unsupervised, non-transparent, and outside the framework of regulation, it poses serious risks such as disinformation, propaganda, bias, and “digital tyranny.” These findings are directly related to the main research questions, as the study focused on how AI affects political stability, digital participation, transparency, and public trust. All figures and tables show that the three main research questions are clearly answered: According to the data, 76–85% of graduates believe that AI increases government transparency, information management, and political stability. This finding is in line with Habermas's public sphere theory, which states that a transparent and informational environment is the basis for public legitimacy. The findings show that 71–82% of graduates are concerned about AI bias, propaganda, and fake content. This confirms the “dominant form” of technology that changes society's values and balance of power from the perspective of Technological Determinism. The findings fully support this question: 87% of graduates say that AI should be used in accordance with Sharia, national interests, and ethics. 85% of graduates consider the need for a legal framework important. 85% of graduates consider increasing digital literacy essential to understanding the benefits and risks of AI.

According to the findings in Table 2, a significant proportion of graduates believe that AI improves government information management, transparency of decision-making, and citizen-state relations. This is theoretically consistent with Habermas's theory that transparent public debate legitimizes democracy. The data in Tables (3) and (4) show that: Artificial intelligence spreads false information rapidly (78%), and Deepfake undermines political trust (73%). This is what Nasiri & Hashemzadeh (2025), Ranka et al. (2024), and Zuboff (2019) have called the risk of “digital tyranny”. Theoretically, this describes the concept of technological determinism, which states that technology itself changes the power structure and, if unchecked, creates social distrust. The findings in Table 4 show that the legitimacy of the use of intelligence is linked to a transparency and ethical framework. This framework is fully consistent with the recommendations of the EU AI Act and UNESCO (2024) that a legal framework is necessary for the regulation of AI. The results in Table 5 indicate a significant

gap: limited public education, a weak media environment, and a lack of understanding of the political implications of AI. These findings are consistent with Tiernan et al. (2023) and Kozyreva et al. (2021), who argue that digital literacy increases society's defenses against disinformation.

Some aspects of the Afghan situation are unique: international studies have shown that the potential for widespread use of AI is high, but in Afghanistan, weak networks, limited access to information, and low literacy levels limit the benefits of AI. Among Afghan graduates, the emphasis on using AI based on Sharia and ethics is high (87%), which is not often seen in international studies. The overall implications of the study findings are as follows: (Implications) AI is a great opportunity for building transparent governance. Unsupervised AI can increase societal division, distrust, and political conflict. The need for a legal framework, digital literacy programs, and a standardized government approach to disinformation is imperative. This study demonstrates in practice that Habermas's theory is fully applicable to transparent information flows. Technological Determinism is a powerful model for analyzing the risks and political influence of AI in Afghanistan. This study is particularly important as a research model for a society with low digital literacy, weak media, and no legal framework for the use of AI. Therefore, this study provides valuable additional information in the context of international studies on "Developing AI Democracies."

5. Conclusions

The study's findings suggest that artificial intelligence (AI) has a dual role in political and social processes: if used in a transparent, ethical, and accountable manner, it strengthens the foundations of democracy, but if used irresponsibly, it poses risks of disinformation, algorithmic control, and digital tyranny. The study found that the specific challenges of Afghanistan's political system and society—such as weak media, low digital literacy, and the lack of a legal framework—can hinder the positive effects of AI. However, the proper and ethical use of AI can strengthen public participation, transparent information management, and a climate of trust between the state and the people. According to Habermas's theory of "public space," the participation of a rational and informed public is realized when information freedom, transparency, and digital literacy are guaranteed. Also, according to the theory of "technocracy," technology is not just a neutral tool, but also changes the nature of power and decision-making. Therefore, it is necessary for Afghanistan to establish a legal framework for the use of artificial intelligence based on Sharia, ethics, and national interests, to increase the digital awareness of the younger generation through higher education, and to popularize a culture of transparency. This will help to use artificial intelligence not as a tool of control, but as a basis for democracy and scientific progress.

Funding: This research received no external funding

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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