

The Global Reformation Revisited: Artificial Intelligence, Authority, and Cycles of Legitimacy in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract: This article conceptualizes the contemporary rise of artificial intelligence (AI) as a long-term socio-technical transformation embedded within recurring historical cycles of authority and legitimacy. Drawing on social studies of technology, political economy, and comparative social theory, specifically classical Islamic historiography, it argues that AI has emerged as a new social institution exercising interpretive authority. By 2026, empirical evidence from global AI investment flows and "Sovereign AI" initiatives in the Global South demonstrates that governance is moving away from claims of universal technological convergence toward a pluralistic global order. The article reframes this fragmentation as a historically consistent response to over-centralization. Understanding AI through this cyclical lens offers a more realistic foundation for sustainable governance in a post-universal digital landscape.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Algorithmic Governance, Ibn Khaldūn, Epistemic Authority, Sovereign AI, Digital Reformation, 2026 Technological Trends.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the first quarter of 2026, Artificial Intelligence is no longer viewed as an "emerging technology" but as the foundational infrastructure of global civilization. While early discourse focused on technical novelty, this article advances the claim that contemporary AI challenges are not historically unique; they reflect recurring social patterns in the organization of authority. Systems of interpretation have repeatedly followed cyclical trajectories: emergence from shared ethical commitments, institutional centralization, and eventually fragmentation as legitimacy erodes. This "Global Reformation" parallels the 16th-century shift in interpretive authority facilitated by the printing press. By combining 2026 empirical analysis with comparative social theory, this article develops a unified framework for understanding AI as a social institution subject to cyclical dynamics of renewal.

II. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

By 2026, AI systems have achieved total institutionalization, performing functions historically associated with bureaucratic and legal bodies.

- Decision-Making Mediation: AI defines risk in finance, eligibility in welfare, and truth in information access.

- State Capacity: According to OECD (2025) data, over 85 countries have integrated "Sovereign AI" into their national strategies, treating computer power as a strategic infrastructure comparable to energy or defense.
- Normative Embedding: These systems do not merely assist decisions; they active structure what counts as value and behavior, often without transparent democratic consent.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- *This Study Utilizes Multi-Dimensional Theoretical Lens:*
 - Social Construction of Technology (SCOT): AI embeds the values and power relations of its designers (Bijker et al., 1987).
 - Political Economy: Control over data and compute constitutes a new form of capital accumulation (Srnicek, 2017).
 - Algorithmic Governance: The displacement of legal and administrative decision-making by automated systems.
 - Cyclical Historiography: Integrating Weber's bureaucratization with Ibn Khaldūn's theory of 'asabiyyah' (social cohesion), which suggests authority declines when it becomes detached from the social and moral needs of the periphery.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to analyze the 2026 landscape. We utilize Comparative Institutional Analysis to map regional divergence in AI governance.

➤ Metrics for Divergence

- Sovereign Infrastructure: Percentage of national data processed in domestic or regionally aligned centers.

- Linguistic Vernacularization: The deployment of Large Language Models (LLMs) trained on indigenous, non-Western datasets.
- Strategic Non-Alignment: The degree of regulatory departure from Western "universal" standards.

V. RESULTS: REGIONAL TRAJECTORIES IN 2026

The 2026 data confirms a significant move toward Regional Hegemony over Universal Convergence.

Table 1 Comparative AI Strategic Indicators (Q1 2026)

Region	Market Size (Est. 2026)	Key Growth Driver	Dominant Strategy
Middle East (GCC)	\$46.7B	State-led "Full-Stack" Ecosystems	Technocratic: High investment in domestic Arabic models.
Africa	\$25.8B	Fintech & AgTech Integration	Vernacular: Focus on local-language data (Swahili/Yoruba).
South America	\$19.4B	Resource Management	Non-Alignment: Launch of "Latam-GPT" and regional clusters.
Global Average	--	32.7% CAGR	Fragmentation: Transition to context-specific governance.

➤ The Rise of Sovereign AI

By 2026, over 70% of Global South countries have enacted data localization laws. The launch of "Latam-GPT" in early 2026 marked a turning point, allowing South American states to decouple administrative functions from North American cloud dependencies.

"Global Reformation" reflects a move toward pluralistic, context-sensitive systems. Sustainable governance will depend not on universal solutions, but on adaptive, historically informed approaches that respect regional sovereignty.

VI. DISCUSSION: DECENTRALIZED EPISTEMIC AUTHORITY

The central analytical contribution of this article is the concept of Decentralized Epistemic Authority. AI enables societies to construct localized interpretation systems, reducing dependence on universalist institutions.

➤ The Khaldūnian Cycle in 2026

The results indicate that the "Silicon Valley Consensus" has reached its expansion limit. In Khaldūnian terms, the centralization of AI authority has led to a loss of social cohesion between the "center" (the tech giants) and the "periphery" (the Global South). The current fragmentation is not an institutional collapse but a cyclical renewal—a "Digital Reformation" where authority is being reclaimed by local entities to align with local values.

➤ Computational Trust and Monetary Shifts

The shift is further evidenced by the 2025-2026 surge in Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs). As of 2026, trust is increasingly vested in computational proofs rather than traditional diplomatic or institutional anchors. This reflects a fundamental change in how global authority is validated.

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VII. CONCLUSION

AI should be understood as a social institution embedded in long-term cycles of legitimacy. The 2026