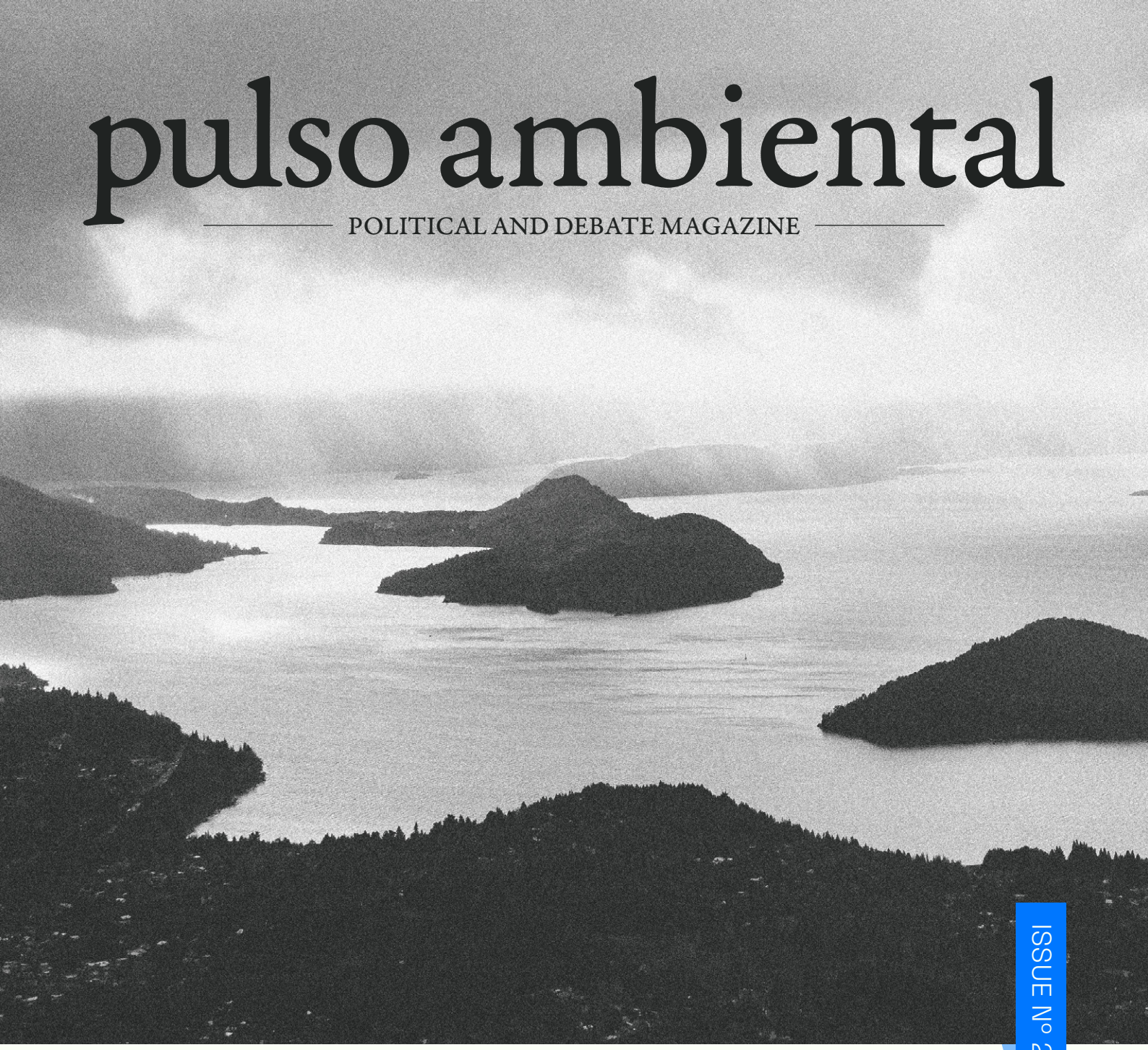
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POLITICAL AND DEBATE MAGAZINE



ISSUE N° 26

A New World

THE RISE OF AI

LAND AND WATER FOR CHATBOTS

STATE SURVEILLANCE AND SECRECY

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ALEJO DI RISIO



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A New World

Artificial intelligence (AI) is entering our lives on a scale unlike anything we have seen before. Still in its early stages, this technology inspires reactions ranging from hope to visions of catastrophe. Whether it marks the fourth industrial revolution or the beginning of the end of humanity —as some former executives of the companies driving its development have warned— there is broad agreement that it will transform what we do, how we relate to one another, and how we think about and understand the world and humanity.

What exactly do we mean when we talk about AI? Most often, we're referring to technologies capable of processing vast amounts of data. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, AI is the capability of computer systems or algorithms to imitate intelligent human behavior.

There are different types of AI, each with its own functions, methods, and data-processing capabilities. Some technologies perform relatively simple data-processing tasks, primarily automating less complex human activities, such as writing texts, creating images, organizing information, summarizing content, and translating. This is already having an impact on the world of work, forcing large numbers of people to seek alternative ways to earn a living as they face competition from technology. The most accessible alternatives are generally found in the informal labor market, particularly in countries like Argentina, further deepening existing inequalities.

Other AI models have even greater impacts. With capabilities that far exceed human potential, these models can generate new content and knowledge, continually reinventing themselves and learning to think independently. As they are designed to adapt and optimize autonomously, their outputs remain difficult to predict.

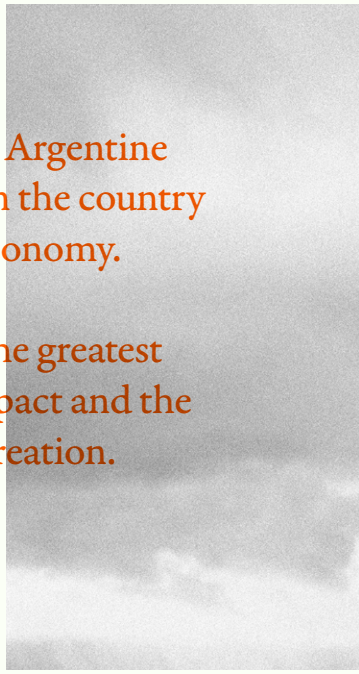
Although AI may seem immaterial and detached from any particular place, existing only in the ether of "the cloud," this technology has and depends on a very real, tangible infrastructure: buildings, servers, cables, fiber-optic networks, energy, and water. Data must be stored somewhere, in data centers that need to be built in actual places. Faced with the enormous amounts of energy consumed by these systems, the industry itself, rather than considering possible future scenarios for reducing consumption or ensuring sustainable use, justifies this expenditure by comparing it to the energy humans use to live, as Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, did at the India AI Impact Summit 2026.

Faced with the enormous amounts of energy consumed by these systems, the industry itself, rather than considering possible future scenarios for reducing consumption or ensuring sustainable use, justifies this expenditure by comparing it to the energy humans use to live.

Data centers of all sizes are already operating in Europe, the United States, China, Brazil, Chile, and other countries. Around the world, communities are increasingly opposing plans to build these facilities, which put their rights at risk. Meanwhile, under the Javier Milei administration, Argentina is seeking to establish itself as an attractive destination for data center development, promoting benefits and favorable conditions for these projects.

Despite concerns raised by experts about local electricity infrastructure and the power needs of projects announced in Patagonia since October 2025, companies may be waiting for a new package of tax breaks and incentives, such as those offered under the proposed “Super RIGI” bill which is still awaiting debate in the Senate. This new framework, which seeks to go even further than the current Large Investment Incentive Regime (RIGI), passed in mid-2024, would deepen an existing national policy that leaves the potential impacts of these projects subject to little or no government oversight. Evidence of this can be seen, on the one hand, in the reduction of responsibilities and budgetary resources allocated to environmental monitoring and enforcement and, on the other hand, in the strengthening of security and intelligence agencies focused on monitoring and surveilling social opposition.

Through these measures, the national government is not only seeking to create favorable economic, social, and political conditions for data centers to set up operations in Argentina, but also to provide companies with legal protection against potential claims in foreign courts. These incentives are intended to remain in place for the next 30 years, based on the projects promoted by the government. Yet they are being advanced without addressing a central issue of sovereignty: who owns, controls, and uses the data.



Building data centers on Argentine soil does little to position the country within the knowledge economy. It is just one part of that process—the one with the greatest socio-environmental impact and the least potential of value creation.

Building data centers on Argentine soil does little to position the country within the knowledge economy. Providing the physical infrastructure needed to develop AI is just one part of that process—the one with the greatest socio-environmental impact and the least potential of value creation. This is exacerbated if no efforts are made at the national level to promote any of the other aspects associated with this technology, such as algorithm design, language model training, and patent ownership.

Alongside these security and intelligence policies, efforts to attract AI developers are also part of a broader social surveillance agenda that opens the door to companies like Palantir Technologies, which has faced criticism and legal complaints in various parts of the world over its use of personal data and alleged human rights violations.



AI raises challenges that are not limited to environmental and development concerns. It also affects how we live together and inhabit our planet. It forces us to consider what we, as humanity, choose to prioritize and what we are willing to leave behind.

From a socio-ecological perspective, AI raises questions that go far beyond the central debate over the extractive use of natural resources to build data centers. These questions concern the broader transformation we need, as a species, to live sustainably within planetary boundaries.

AI raises challenges that are not limited to environmental and development concerns. It also affects how we live together and inhabit our planet. It forces us to consider what we, as humanity, choose to prioritize and what we are willing to leave behind. Who makes and controls decisions that could transform how we understand life and the world? Who benefits from these choices, and who is harmed by them? What impact does this model have on the environment, democracy, and human rights? What do countries stand to gain by providing their territory for data centers running technology they do not control? How can we broaden this debate and ensure meaningful public participation in decisions that will irreversibly shape our future?

Every major technological breakthrough responds to the needs of a society, addressing a problem humanity is trying to solve. But technology is not free of biases or vested interests. Rather than providing solutions, it can end up reproducing many of the very problems we are trying to fix.

At the same time, the current planetary crisis has shown us that, quite often, humanity already has the knowledge needed to address urgent challenges. There is ample evidence regarding the causes and consequences of our systems of production, consumption, and waste, documented and compiled by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), and scientists around the world. The main challenge is building the political and social consensus required to implement the policies humanity needs. The rise of AI confronts us with a similar challenge: what agreements will govern its use? How can we agree on regulations and establish safe limits for its development when the keys to this technology are held in so few hands?

Perhaps, instead of searching for so many answers, we could ask just one ethical and philosophical question that matters more than any other: what functions or responsibilities are we willing to delegate to machines without giving up our own humanity or jeopardizing the possibility of life on this planet?



What Does the Government Hide When It Uses AI?

The government enthusiastically announces artificial intelligence initiatives, but does not disclose which software it contracts or how the systems were trained. In this interview, Margarita Trovato of Fundación Vía Libre describes the obstacles to investigating the government's use of this technology and, in particular, what happens to our personal data.

In July 2024, Argentina's Ministry of National Security created the Artificial Intelligence Applied to Security Unit through Resolution 710/2024. The following October, OpenAI—the company behind ChatGPT—announced plans to build a massive data center in Patagonia. The announcement came after a meeting between company representatives and President Javier Milei. In May of this year, the Ministry of Human Capital introduced the Social Digital Twin, an AI-based tool intended to inform social policy, on social media.

The government tends to publicize its use of artificial intelligence with boastful, celebratory announcements. In the case of the Social Digital Twin, Milei reposted the institutional video on X. In the public sphere, the use of AI is presented as synonymous with innovation, efficiency, and the future. Yet little is known beyond the official messaging. The AI models and software being used have not been disclosed, nor is there information about the companies contracted, how the technology was trained or, still less, what types of data will be used and how.

Fundación Vía Libre was founded in 2000, already 26 years ago. Initially, it focused on access to knowledge online, open licensing, and open-source software. As technology and the digital world evolved rapidly, the organization grew and expanded into more projects and areas of work. Today, it specializes in defending social, cultural, economic, civil and political rights in spaces shaped by digital technology.

In this interview, Margarita Trovato, a lawyer and Head of Public Policy at Fundación Vía Libre, discusses the difficulties involved in finding out what the government is doing with AI and our data.

Today, different artificial intelligence models are used in surveillance systems. What are these systems like, and what risks do they pose to human rights?

It is very difficult to know which technologies are being used for government surveillance. We can describe them, but because contracts are confidential and accountability is lacking, we cannot determine exactly which systems the government has contracted. There are facial-recognition tools, biometric identification and cyberpatrolling—different government activities carried out with technologies linked to artificial intelligence—but we do not know exactly which tools they are. A few months ago, for example, the Ministry of Human Capital announced the Digital Twin program. It would supposedly use all the available data on Argentina's citizens to run simulations and test variables, with the aim of developing more effective public policy through AI. This kind of technology resembles the system sold by Palantir Technologies, which enables data to be cross-referenced on a massive scale. But we do not know whether that is actually the technology that will be used. AI has many possible applications, and we are basically in the dark about all of them: so we ask ourselves what systems are involved or what kind they are. We see the announcement about the use of technology, but we have no way to control or understand what is actually being implemented.



Minister Sandra Pettovello in the institutional video introducing the Social Digital Twinn (AI-generated image).

→ Privacy enables people to exercise other rights, including freedom of expression, the right to protest, the right to pursue their own life plans and the right to a private life. There is a first narrative and discursive challenge that is understanding why mass surveillance is a problem for everyone.

At Fundación Vía Libre, you submit public-information requests to obtain the missing details. What kinds of responses do you receive?

We submit many requests, but the responses do not allow us to understand what is happening. There is a willingness to avoid being held accountable, to evade questions or to answer them only partially. We also encounter the famous national-security justification, which is nothing new in matters involving surveillance, security and intelligence. Yet our requests are often not about security at all, but about quantitative matters. For example, we ask whether software was contracted for a particular task and which company received the contract. Trade secrecy is another obstacle. Because these technologies are generally developed by private companies, vendors invoke trade secrets, intellectual-property rights over algorithms and confidentiality restrictions covering the technology's components. As a result, when we try to audit, understand what is happening, identify the safeguards in place, learn how the system was trained or determine whether it is discriminatory, answers are withheld on the grounds of vendor trade secrecy.

This lack of official information prevents citizens from knowing what happens with our data...

The government provides no answers, but we can draw inferences. The same is true of companies, which are only a handful, based in three or four countries, and dominate the sector and regularly appear in the news. We can also draw conclusions from Peter Thiel's move to Argentina; from the publication of regulations that expand authorization for data sharing within the government, which this kind of software requires; and from measures allowing these companies to establish here. Even without official information, we can piece the puzzle together. As for personal data, we know how these technologies operate in other countries. Palantir's impact on human rights is documented. We can look at the case of ICE in the United States, which benefits from access to this data, or at the scandal over the handling of health data in the United Kingdom a few years ago.

How do citizens respond to these situations? What legal or political tools do they have?

It is a complex issue. First, there is always this dichotomy between privacy and security, or between privacy and efficiency, as though sacrificing privacy were acceptable in exchange for greater security, a more efficient government and better-targeted public policy. This assumption is deeply rooted in common sense and difficult to challenge. Privacy enables people to exercise other rights, including freedom of expression, the right to protest, the right to pursue their own life plans and the right to a private life. There is a first narrative and discursive challenge that is understanding why mass surveillance is a problem for everyone.

There have been very few lawsuits. One interesting case arose in Germany, where a court ruled that software that processes data in the manner of Palantir, for example, is unconstitutional. In other words, under their standards governing data protection, privacy and informational self-determination, data cannot constitutionally be used on a massive, systematic scale to create profiles.

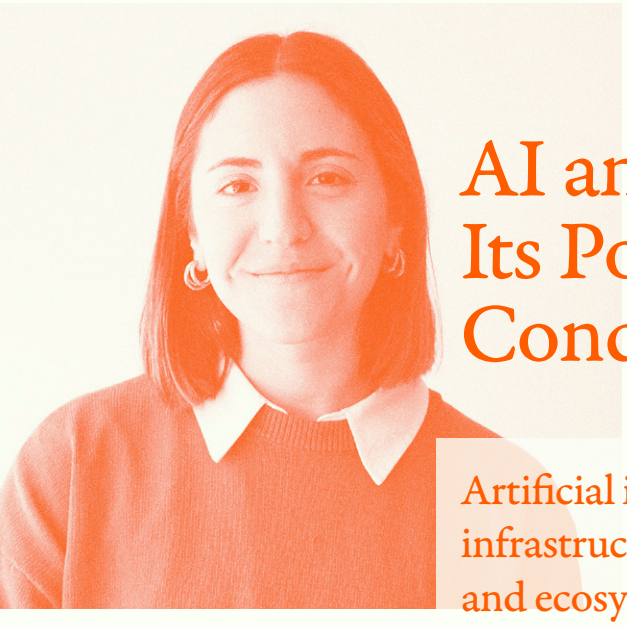
This suggests an important approach: rather than challenging each company individually—especially given the secrecy described earlier—we can establish standards. If these are the regulations, the Constitution, international standards and conventions, then certain uses of technology should not be permitted.

What data-protection regulations exist in Argentina, and what limitations do they face in establishing those standards?

Argentina's Personal Data Protection Act, Law No. 25,326, was passed in 2000, under completely different circumstances, but it contains general principles that are still worth defending. Several reform bills are under consideration, some with the support of the executive branch, which would effectively weaken those principles. Although the law has controversial provisions, is outdated, lacks enforcement mechanisms and needs reform, those general principles can still provide some protection against technology developing at this pace. These include consent; purpose limitation, meaning that data may be used only for the purpose for which it was collected; data minimization, meaning that the smallest possible amount of data should be retained for the shortest possible period; and the requirement for oversight and confidentiality mechanisms. This means there are strong principles that align with international law. However, the law also provides broad exceptions to the requirements concerning purpose and consent, and it does not address many present-day scenarios. Argentina also has a regulatory framework that is not concerned with data protection but with the opposite: it governs intelligence, surveillance and security activities by the armed forces, enabling broader surveillance, data sharing, social-media monitoring and the use of technology.

CAMILA MERCURE

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AI and Climate Change: Its Potential, Limits and Conditions

Artificial intelligence requires natural resources and infrastructure, with direct consequences for the territories and ecosystems where data centers are built. At the same time, it may offer important benefits: different experiences across the Global South show how AI tools can help predict climate risks. At a recent summit in New Delhi, participants discussed the conditions needed to use this technology in ways that actually benefit the climate and communities.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming increasingly embedded in our daily lives, changing how we access and process information. However, its expansion comes at a cost, with social, territorial, and environmental consequences. The growth of the infrastructure needed to support AI increases demand for energy and water, among other things. It also raises questions about where data centers are located, which energy sources power them, and how they affect territories and communities. At the same time, another question arises: can AI help address climate change fairly and inclusively?

A Summit for the Global South

The first Global South AI Summit took place in New Delhi, India, from February 16 to 21, 2026. During the summit, experts from a range of fields, from AI and climate science to energy, public policy, and community engagement, developed recommendations to explore how these emerging technologies could support climate mitigation, adaptation, and resilience, particularly in the Global South.

Among other things, AI could help process large volumes of data to identify climate risk patterns and, therefore, anticipate them, and strengthen early warning systems.

One of the main conclusions is that technology should be based on the problem it aims to solve, rather than the other way around. To support this approach, a report published this year by Dalberg Global Development Advisors & CEEW recommends strengthening long-term research and making climate data accessible and interoperable. It also advises against relying exclusively on global data, which may not reflect local climate, social, environmental, and infrastructure conditions. In addition, it recommends designing tools in collaboration with communities and incorporating traditional knowledge and local practices to ensure that solutions are appropriate to their context.

→ Climate solutions should stem from actual needs on the ground, and not the other way around, which is having a technology and finding a use for it.

Anticipating Before Losing (Sight of) the Forest

When it comes to its uses, the report identifies several potential applications, ranging from agriculture and forest monitoring to early warning systems and tools that strengthen local resilience. In Brazil, the PrevisIA project uses satellite imagery and AI to predict deforestation risks in the Amazon. It analyzes topography, land cover, urban infrastructure, official and unofficial roads, socioeconomic data, and other factors to identify possible patterns of forest loss.

In Ethiopia, the MedEWSa project integrates AI models into the operational workflows of national parks and weather services, processing complex climate data to simulate wildfires in real time and issue alerts, while local authorities retain responsibility for operational decisions.



More than 80 countries participated in the India AI Impact Summit 2026 in New Delhi. Source: AFP

Researchers have also examined the use of AI in climate change adaptation. Jain et al. (2023), for example, suggest that AI could play a vital role in detecting subtle warning signs before a climate event, improving the ability to anticipate and respond to it. Potential applications include predicting floods with machine-learning algorithms; modeling the spread of wildfires with convolutional neural networks (CNNs) that analyze satellite data and images from field cameras; and identifying landslide risks. These applications could process large volumes of information and detect patterns that are difficult to identify, supporting preventive measures and strengthening preparedness for extreme climate events.

→ AI-based climate tools should be built with the collaboration of communities and their local knowledge, and it cannot replace political decision-making, or the responsibility of governments.

Conditions for a Responsible Use

Although we have mentioned some of the potential applications of AI in addressing climate change, its development should not come at any cost or worsen the very problems it is intended to help solve. Its social, environmental, territorial, energy, and water impacts must be considered, with due regard for planetary boundaries and community rights. AI-based tools should respond to local needs and realities, and local stakeholders should participate early and meaningfully in their design and implementation.

Although AI can help generate and process information to anticipate risks and guide responses, the challenge is often not a lack of data but the difficulty of translating available knowledge into concrete decisions and policies. Technology can support these processes, but it cannot replace political decision-making, community participation, or the responsibility of governments.

The question, then, is not only what AI can do to address climate change, but also why it should be used, for whom and under what conditions.

RAMIRO ALBRIEU

Economist. Director of Sur Futuro and Associate Researcher at the Center for the Study of State and Society (CEDES) and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).



Artificial Intelligence and Employment: A Latin American Perspective

AI is creating opportunities for professional and technical jobs, but it also puts certain mid-skill jobs at risk and carries an environmental cost that cannot be ignored. How is this transformation affecting Latin America, and what policies does the region need to avoid falling behind?

Labor markets have undergone major transformations throughout history. In one such shift, people moved from rural to urban areas, and agricultural jobs were gradually replaced by manufacturing jobs. Today, we are witnessing a similar transition. This time around, jobs are shifting from manufacturing to services, and from the world of atoms to the world of bits. Behind this shift is artificial intelligence (AI), itself the convergence of two well-established innovation pathways: datafication—the digitization turning every physical movement into data—and algorithmization—the ability to identify patterns in that digital space. What makes this convergence revolutionary is that decades of human knowledge accumulated through datafication are now just a prompt away.

→ Decades of human knowledge accumulated through datafication are now just a prompt away.

An Advantage of Our Own

Like any revolution, AI brings opportunities to overcome problems of the past. By reshaping how knowledge is produced and applied, it opens up new possibilities for professional and technical jobs, which are in short supply across the region. Education is a prime example: AI could help improve both the quality and reach of educational services.

In Latin America, AI assists workers in 21% of jobs rather than replace them. Plus, the versatility of Latin America's workforce gives the region a tangible advantage. In less developed economies, workers take on peripheral tasks—marketing, management, communications, and finance—that are outsourced in the Global North, making it harder to specialize. AI can automate some of these tasks, boosting productivity and earnings in mid- and lower-level jobs.

→ The versatility of Latin America's workforce gives the region a tangible advantage: workers take on tasks that are outsourced in developed economies, and AI could enhance their ability to perform those jobs rather than replace them.

Yet, as with any major disruption, there will be winners and losers. The risks are manifold, from imbalances in governance to AI's environmental footprint: it requires water, critical minerals, and copious amounts of energy. In the labor market, the negative impact is more concentrated, affecting 5% of jobs across the region. These are mid-skill office, customer service, and administrative support roles—occupations already under pressure from digitalization, in which women account for nearly 70% of the workforce. These middle-class jobs are where AI is causing the greatest harm. Another emerging trend is also cause for concern: entry-level jobs in the tech sector are increasingly being standardized and automated at a rapid pace.

Looking Closer, Acting Faster

The future of work is still being contested, and the path ahead will depend on what governments and the private sector do in the near future. Neither Silicon Valley's optimism nor today's fashionable pessimism is a desirable way forward; both are luxuries our region cannot afford. Instead, we need to act with two priorities in mind. First, looking closer, as the evidence informing our actions and policies is skewed toward high-income countries. Second, acting decisively, fundamentally rethinking workforce training and technological innovation ecosystems to bring the global flow of ideas closer to the realities of Latin America's labor markets. The window of opportunity is there, and the future has yet to be written.

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Super RIGI: Expanding a Framework with Well-Known Risks

If the Super RIGI bill, currently under debate in the Argentine Senate, is passed, it would further expand the privileges granted to large investors and extend the benefits package to new industries without defining a productive development strategy for the country. Past experiences regarding lawsuits against Argentina raise questions about the cost of continuing to give up tools for regulating investments.

In 2024, Argentina introduced the Large Investment Incentive Regime (RIGI), a program offering a 30-year package of tax, foreign exchange, and customs benefits for investors in eight economic sectors, though in practice, investment has gone exclusively to mining and oil and gas. The law that created the program also allows companies to take disputes with the country to international arbitration. The Super RIGI bill, submitted to Congress in May 2026 and now under debate in the Senate, does nothing to address these risks. Instead, it deepens them and introduces new ones.

Unlike the original RIGI, Super RIGI applies to investments of at least USD 1 billion and opens the door for unspecified "new industries" to join the program. These are thought to include digital infrastructure, data centers, microchips, and green hydrogen.

In addition, for the next six years after the law is passed, the national government would be able to add new sectors through the executive orders regulating the law, without congressional debate or any clear strategy for developing domestic industry. This turns industrial policy on its head. Instead of deciding which industries the country needs to develop and what conditions investors should meet, this would grant special privileges to whoever brings forward a qualifying project. In this sense, Honduras offers a troubling precedent. There, the Economic Development and Employment Zones (ZEDE) framework paved the way for Próspera, an area with broad regulatory autonomy that attracted genetic experimentation companies and crypto communities, with little connection to the country's productive or social development needs.

A Longstanding Rule Under Threat

RIGI also broke with a longstanding principle of international investment law by extending arbitration between investors and the country to large domestic investors, something no Argentine bilateral investment treaty (BIT) provides for. Super RIGI preserves this approach, which could be described as a "BIT-plus" framework granting any investor rights that even foreign investors were denied under the BITs executed in the 1990s. The issue, then, is not just national sovereignty in the face of foreign capital, but also the country's ability to regulate companies, including in sectors that have yet to be defined.

Argentina is already familiar with the risks. By 2025, the country had faced 65 investor claims, nearly all before the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID), with costs exceeding USD 9.33 billion from lost cases and settlements. Several companies associated with RIGI, including Rio Tinto and Chevron, have a history of suing other countries. Super RIGI would thus extend a mechanism that has already proved costly for Argentina to new industries.

→ Super RIGI would extend a mechanism that has already proved costly for Argentina to new industries.

Other countries in the region offer a telling comparison. Brazil is debating a legal framework for artificial intelligence, amid delays and pressure from businesses, while also developing a special tax regime for data centers (Redata). The regime requires companies to make commitments in return, including investment in research and development and the use of renewable energy. Brazil is also neither a member of ICSID nor bound by any bilateral investment treaties currently in force, meaning disputes against Brazil are resolved in its domestic courts. Uruguay, meanwhile, is negotiating with HIF Global over the price of the electricity supplied by the state-owned utility UTE. At the very least, the talks involve a debate over how much the resources made available to private capital should cost.

→ While companies stand to gain lower taxes, 30 years of regulatory stability, and access to international arbitration, the benefits they are required to deliver to society are far less substantial.

The Costs Behind the Promise

Super RIGI is built around the promise of massive investment in data centers, an industry whose environmental and territorial costs are already becoming apparent across the region. These include heavy water, land, and energy use, with relatively few jobs created in return. Its expansion also raises a fundamental question: how much room will Argentina have to prioritize people's needs over corporate demands when resources are scarce? Both RIGI and Super RIGI deepen a model that creates sacrifice zones while giving large corporations legal certainty.

We at the RIGI Observatory oppose this bill. The question is not simply whether it will attract investment, but on what terms and for whose benefit. While companies stand to gain lower taxes, 30 years of regulatory stability, and access to international arbitration, the benefits they are required to deliver to society are far less substantial. Super RIGI gives investors greater certainty while leaving the government with fewer tools to direct investment toward the public interest.

FERMÍN KOOP

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Data Centers Are Draining Latin America's Water and Energy

AI comes at a cost in water and energy that companies are not disclosing. The construction of data centers in Brazil, Mexico, Chile, and Argentina is sparking conflicts with local communities over the water and energy these facilities consume. The question is: what rules will govern the continued expansion of this infrastructure across the region?

Every time we ask a chatbot a question or give it a task, a machine somewhere in the world heats up and has to be cooled down. This seemingly simple process is reshaping Latin America's energy and water landscape.

The scale is alarming. According to the International Energy Agency, data centers already consume around 1.5% of the world's electricity, and that demand is expected to double by 2030. Water use tells a similar story: a single data center can consume up to 19 million liters a day, as much as a city of 50,000 people—such as Gualeguaychú, Río Tercero, or Tres Arroyos—uses in an entire day.

Latin America: Contested Ground

Brazil, Mexico, and Chile currently account for most of this infrastructure in the region. In each case, the model is the same: investment in exchange for water, land, and energy. São Paulo is one of the best-documented examples. A study published in *Cambridge Prisms*: Water measured data centers in the metropolitan area, which have a combined operational load of around 550 MW. Researchers found that these centers consume 16.1 million cubic meters of water a year, or more than 44,000 cubic meters a day. Nearly half of that water use is "invisible": the water evaporates from the reservoirs of the hydroelectric dams that generate the electricity powering those servers. You never see it flowing out of a tap, but it is still being lost from the system.

→ Every conversation with a chatbot depletes water resources: in just one day, a single data center can consume as much water as a city of 50,000 people.

Conflicts are already unfolding. The Anacé Indigenous community in Ceará, Brazil, is fighting the construction of a data center linked to TikTok that would cover an area equivalent to twelve soccer fields. In Peru, where some areas are already experiencing severe water stress, experts warn that adding this extra pressure could become a "social time bomb." And in Argentina, a project by OpenAI and Sur Energy plans to build a data center with a capacity of 500 MW.

The Office of the Special Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) has already raised the alarm. In a press release, it noted that conflicts linked to this digital infrastructure are emerging across virtually the entire continent.

→ Most data centers don't know how much water they consume, because fewer than a third of their operators monitor their water use.

Concrete Data to Fight Back

The lack of transparency is another problem. One study found that fewer than one-third of data center operators monitor Water Usage Effectiveness (WUE), the industry's basic measure of water efficiency. When they do publish figures, they rarely discriminate between the water used directly for cooling and the water consumed indirectly to generate electricity. Without that data, any debate over permits or public participation is stacked against communities from the outset.

The fundamental question, then, is not whether Latin America will host more digital infrastructure, but under what rules. There is still time to demand transparency about actual water and energy consumption, make permits conditional on rigorous environmental impact assessments, and ensure that communities have a say in deciding where and how these projects are built. None of this is set in stone. This is a political issue, and the battle can still be fought.

CÉCILE DIGUET

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The Digital Infrastructure Crystallizing Environmental Challenges

The AI boom has multiplied data center expansion worldwide, particularly in the United States, Europe, and China, while Argentina is emerging as a new investment destination. However, the environmental and social impacts of the infrastructure underpinning digital life have prompted public opposition, which in some countries has led to new regulations.

Data centers emerged in the late 20th century, as the internet became increasingly commercial and growing numbers of websites required data storage. From the 2010s onward, the development of cloud services, meaning the outsourcing and virtualization of information systems for companies and individuals, brought new actors into the sector.

On the one hand, there is colocation, which involves a single building that houses data belonging to several companies, such as Odata, Elea, Equinix, Digital Realty, and Vantage. On the other hand, there are large companies that offer more comprehensive services, including Microsoft, Amazon, and Google. These three companies account for 63–65% of the global cloud market, giving the sector a structure similar to a monopoly.

In the early 2020s, the pandemic transformed digital practices worldwide, and the launch of the first ChatGPT model ushered in extremely rapid growth in the use of AI, particularly generative AI. This expansion requires many more data centers, increases electricity demand, and raises water consumption for cooling because AI relies on far more powerful graphics processing units, or GPUs.

This brief historical overview helps explain the explosive growth of recent years, in which several trends have converged and been accelerated by massive investment in AI. The International Energy Agency provides figures that illustrate this growth: data centers consumed 400 TWh in 2024—roughly equivalent to France's total electricity consumption—and are projected to consume just over 500 TWh in 2026, and more than twice that amount, 1,200 TWh, by 2035 under a medium-growth scenario.

→ Argentina's government is seeking to accelerate investments from data centers through tax incentives such as the "Super RIGI," along with a promise to exempt these projects from social and environmental requirements.

Who Concentrates Data Centers

Geographically, data centers have expanded most rapidly in the United States, which has 4,000 facilities and the world's largest concentration in Virginia, with almost 600 sites. Europe has approximately 2,700 data centers, while China has between 600 and 1,000, according to available sources, because precise inventories are difficult to obtain due to the sector's lack of transparency. In Latin America, the three largest markets are Brazil, with 537 MW of capacity; Mexico, with 298 MW; and Chile, with 166 MW. Argentina remains a much smaller market, at 32 MW, because of its geographic location, economic instability, and energy matrix, which depends far more heavily on fossil fuels than those of neighboring Chile and Brazil. Nevertheless, OpenAI announced projects in northern Patagonia in November last year, although no further news has emerged since then. The current government is seeking to accelerate this type of investment through tax incentives such as the "Super RIGI" (Large Investments Incentive Regime), along with a promise to exempt these projects from social and environmental requirements.



A data center operated by Claro in Colegiales, Buenos Aires.

Social and Environmental Impact

Data centers have impacts at several scales: as individual buildings, as clusters of facilities known as hubs, and as a national industry, because it can strain both the electricity grid and generation capacity. In Ireland, for example, data centers account for 25% of the country's electricity consumption. As a consequence, this demand has produced instability, causing supply shortages for other users and creating bottlenecks in the grid.

First, data centers consume large amounts of electricity to operate and cool their servers. During power outages, they rely on gasoline backup generators, which contribute to air pollution. Potential consequences include:

- Locally, there is a risk of blocks in the distribution grid due to demand concentration.
- Investment may be needed to modernize or reinforce the main transmission grid, sometimes in sparsely populated areas rather than in places where it could connect more users.
- Energy resources may be diverted from household needs or from uses required for decarbonization, such as mobility and heating.
- Electricity may also be generated from fossil fuels behind the meter, meaning on-site and without passing through the public grid.

Second, these are new buildings that imply:

- A strong carbon footprint related to the construction and materials used (concrete).
- Environmental impacts caused by the conversion of land that was previously natural habitat, farmland, or forest.
- Very limited potential to repurpose the building for other uses.

Third, when electricity prices are high, operators may choose cooling systems that consume large amounts of water. Although this is not always the case, if used, such systems can intensify water stress, as in Quilicura in northern Santiago, Chile. In addition, all cooling systems—including those that consume less water—use chemicals that can contaminate groundwater to some extent. Finally, data centers must extract the hot air generated by their servers, warming the surrounding area. During heat waves, this can be very problematic in densely populated urban areas, and become a serious public health issue.

Growing Resistance and Regulations

For all these reasons, resistance is growing and governments in many countries are showing a stronger commitment to regulation (several US states have introduced moratoriums, while civil opposition is increasing in countries including the Netherlands and Spain). The cloud is finally in a very strong position, and the explosive growth of AI has at least made the digital sector's environmental impact more visible.

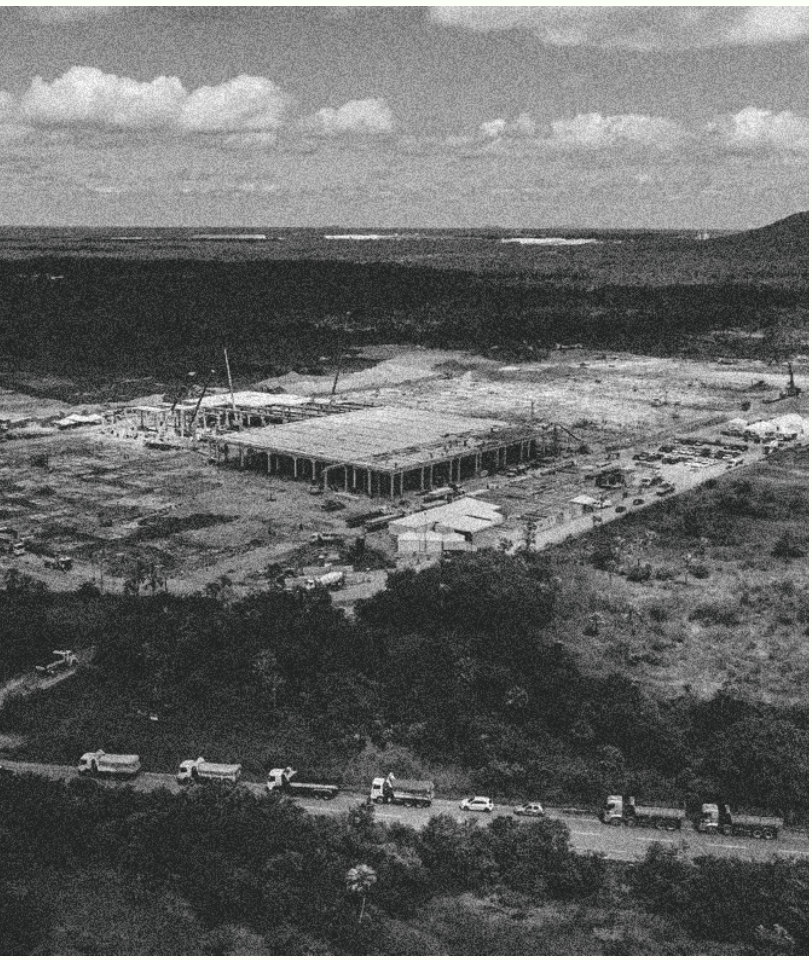
JAVIER PALUMMO

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Governing the Costs of Progress

AI is not immaterial. It depends on water, energy, land, minerals, and human labor that often goes unseen. Across the Americas, the challenge is not to choose between innovation and rights, but to govern the expansion of AI infrastructure through rules that prevent harm, ensure corporate due diligence, and distribute its benefits and costs fairly.



Construction of ByteDance's data center at the Pecém Industrial and Port Complex (Ceará, Brazil). Credit: Dado Galdier, Bloomberg Línea.

The Infrastructure We Don't See

We tend to imagine artificial intelligence is something immaterial and autonomous, something that simply happens. It isn't. Behind every model are data centers, power grids, books that are digitized and destroyed, water, minerals, land, and an extensive chain of often overlooked human labor involved in producing, sorting, and verifying data. When we make this material reality visible, our whole perspective shifts: AI is not just a matter of technological innovation, but also of human rights, the environment, and decisions about development.

Digital infrastructure is strategically important to the Americas. It can expand access to education, healthcare, information, and public services, boost productivity, and create opportunities for greater inclusion. The issue, then, is not whether to choose between innovation and human rights, but how to regulate the expansion of this infrastructure and how its benefits and burdens should be distributed.

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Who Bears the Costs?

Large-scale data centers require substantial amounts of water and electricity, putting pressure on ecosystems and local communities. Against the backdrop of the climate crisis, water stress, and inequality, these impacts can affect the availability and affordability of essential services and undermine rights such as access to water and healthcare, the right to a healthy environment, and the right to a decent standard of living. This is because technology does not arrive in a vacuum—it interacts with existing inequalities and can deepen them.

That is why it is not enough to ask how much investment a project will secure or how many jobs it promises to create. We also need to know what resources it will use, what public incentives it will receive, what kind of jobs it will create and how long those jobs will last, how much value will stay in local economies, and who will ultimately pay for the external costs. The question of distribution is crucial: who makes the decisions, who benefits, and who bears the costs?

Governing the Transformation

This approach calls for a comprehensive assessment of environmental, climate, and social impacts, including their cumulative and synergistic effects. When several projects compete to be set up in the same area, drawing on its water, energy, and infrastructure, assessing each one in isolation can obscure the true extent of the risks. Countries must put appropriate regulatory frameworks in place and ensure that information on water and energy consumption is publicly available, timely, and easy to understand. They must also guarantee meaningful community participation, access to environmental justice, and effective accountability mechanisms.

Businesses, in turn, have a responsibility to respect human rights and exercise due diligence, identifying, preventing, mitigating, and answering for their impacts, and contributing to remedying them where appropriate. When risks are serious and foreseeable, the government's duty to prevent harm may require making new permits conditional on certain safeguards or, where adequate protections are lacking, considering temporary permit suspensions while appropriate regulatory frameworks are designed and implemented.

The digital transformation cannot be built by offloading the costs onto particular territories or populations. The challenge is not to decide whether the region will take part in the AI revolution, but to define what kind of digital transformation we want, under what rules, at what cost, and for whose benefit.

The views expressed in this article are personal and do not necessarily reflect those of REDESCA, the IACHR, or the Organization of American States.

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“Artificial intelligence limits any ability to imagine alternatives”

Current technological developments compel us to consider their impact not only at the economic and political levels, but also at the human level. In this interview, Cecilia Rikap, an economist, the author of *Teoría de la dependencia digital*, Head of Research at the Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose (IIPP) and Associate Professor in Economics at University College London (UCL), discusses the risks and challenges that AI models and the companies behind them pose to sovereignty, the environment and democracy.

To whom does artificial intelligence belong?

Artificial intelligence (AI) depends on or belongs to a handful of large companies, particularly those commonly known as big tech, including the cloud giants. These companies not only are responsible for a large share of the funding received by many AI startups; they also benefit the most from the technology. Capitalism is harder to interpret today than it was in the past because, among other reasons, ownership is not synonymous with control. When we ask who AI belongs to, while we can formally point to Anthropic, OpenAI, and Mistral, we can also say big tech such as Meta, Google, Amazon, and Microsoft. Ultimately, however, the more important question is who controls them. Are all these companies the same? Obviously not. The companies that control the pace and direction of technological change—and benefit the most from it—are primarily Amazon, Microsoft, and Google, although they are not the only ones developing AI models. Meta could also be placed alongside them, whereas OpenAI, Mistral, and Anthropic are not currently profitable and depend on funding from the other giants.

What risks or challenges arise from the ownership and control of these models?

AI is a paradigmatic example of technology of control as it is used to monitor workers, individuals, and social media, but also as an automated weapon in wars, and as a technology that can replace our own ability to think. With generative AI, we outsource not only answers but also the formulation of questions. In doing so, we outsource our creative and critical-thinking abilities. The fact that this technology is concentrated in the hands of a few companies—which shape the direction and trajectory of technological

change—creates risks at every level. And these are not the risks that the same companies amplify through fear-based marketing to sell more products and foster the impression that their technology is so powerful that it might escape their control. We can already see concrete risks materializing in a process of not only greater workplace surveillance, but also the replacement of tasks, a shift toward more informal employment, and deteriorating working and living conditions. The environmental crisis is also undeniably worsening. Generative AI consumes quantities of electricity and drinking water that jeopardize the already slim prospects of an effective energy transition and a just ecological transformation. This high electricity consumption has also led communities near data centers in the United States to pay higher electricity and water bills. Another risk is the weakening of our ability to imagine alternatives. When we outsource every question to AI and stop collectively practicing criticism and reflection, we limit our ability to devise solutions to these problems.

Given all these risks, what is the relationship between governments and States, and companies like these?
When we speak of governments in the plural, we must recognize not only their different political orientations but also their different capabilities. The governments of the United States and China have far more leverage when negotiating with companies based in their countries than governments elsewhere, including those in the European Union. Nowadays, Europe is part of the digital periphery, so European governments have a limited ability to impose conditions on, regulate, or control both technological change and these companies in particular, although they may have more room to maneuver than a government such as Argentina's. Who governs also matters. A government like Javier Milei's, whose priority is to attract these companies, will not have the same interests as a government like Brazil's, where the contradictions are more visible. On the one hand, such governments acknowledge that these companies' control over critical technologies reduces national sovereignty. At the same time, even progressive governments remain trapped in an ideological narrative that presents technology as a necessary—and, in some ways, sufficient—condition for economic growth. Influenced by this narrative, governments feel they need these companies to build data centers on their territory. They try to persuade them to invest locally in development and establish links with research institutions and universities, expecting this to generate technology transfer, economic growth, and with redistribution policies, progress, and development. The problem is that the opposite occurs. When a company installs a data center, it intensifies the extraction of natural resources in the area and appropriates local knowledge produced by universities and startups. Traditional formulae—innovation, economic growth, and redistributive policies—do not work. The concept of a public-private partnership essentially means that the State gives away even more because it cannot impose conditions on these companies. They become beneficiaries of public funding without meaningfully sharing control over decisions or priorities.

→ The more important question is not who AI belongs to, but who controls it.

This brings us to the question of alternatives. The region has long-standing traditional, indigenous knowledge that some groups are trying to recover, yet this technology overrides it. It limits our ability to think, to think outside the box, it reflects an extreme form of modernity...

Other knowledge systems are completely marginalized. When someone possesses tacit knowledge acquired through experience, by interacting with AI that gets extracted. It is like in Harry Potter when they suck out people's souls. That is exactly what happens: the technology extracts your soul, the singular quality of a process of experience that is always collective and developed with others. AI individualizes us and limits our ability to imagine alternatives. To do so, we need to reconnect the capabilities that still exist in the region. One concrete example would be collaboration, or public-public cooperation, between a company such as Arsat and Uruguay's Antel. We also need to challenge another form of reductionism: the tendency to equate AI exclusively with generative AI or ChatGPT. Generative AI is a less rigorous form of AI in the sense that the same model can be used for a wide range of tasks, making it much more dangerous for jobs. At the same time, other models perform specific tasks that individual human beings cannot carry out, such as processing enormous amounts of data. We could use such models, for example, to compile inventories of nature and changes in the environmental crisis by mapping, publicly and openly, how the planet is being degraded. We human beings cannot individually process all of that information. We need to think carefully about how this process would work: it would require global data collection, with a shared database that does not belong to any company, along with the recognition that technological development never solves a problem on its own. Models capable of compiling these inventories already exist, but they have not been widely and publicly adopted, or combined with the knowledge of Indigenous peoples and communities so that solutions can be developed collectively. Technology is always political and serves particular interests. The goal is not to reject it, but to democratize decisions about which interests are represented, which questions are prioritized in scientific and technological development, and how the technology itself is developed. Unless we democratize that, the default outcome will benefit the minority that made those decisions and that controls the resources.

→ By outsourcing every question to AI and stop collectively practicing criticism and reflection, we limit our ability to devise solutions to these problems.

→ We need to democratize decisions about which interests are represented, which questions are prioritized in scientific and technological development, and how the technology itself is developed. Unless we democratize that, the default outcome will benefit the minority that made those decisions and that controls the resources.

The quality of public deliberation is declining because algorithms track us, we hear only from people who share our views, and debate lacks diversity. What impact do you think this has on democracy?

Even before social media, democracy had serious shortcomings: there was a lack of spaces for genuine democratic participation, and a process of degradation. This provided the perfect breeding ground for social media—and, increasingly, AI—to create a false impression of democratization or openness in the public sphere, where the actors who decide which post reaches the largest audience and which are effectively suppressed remain invisible. As long as only the technology giants can see the whole forest, you continue believing that your own tree will lead the way. So you post again and again, yet your content never reaches anyone. It has therefore become much harder to define what the space for democracy is, but I think this problem cannot be addressed separately from our economic system and the way technology is developed. AI deepens inequality not only economically, but also socially and politically. This is partly reflected in the divide between a minority that understands how social media and algorithms work and a majority that does not, increasingly outsourcing its capacity to think, and becoming less able to close that gap. This process also deepens ecological inequality: data centers are not built in the heart of Silicon Valley or in the wealthiest major cities of countries. As inequality intensifies at every level, people will undoubtedly lose even more faith in democracy because their lives continue to get worse. Radical change is needed. Cosmetic adjustments, like adding a few provisions and conditions, are not enough. We need structural change in public policy: in how it is made and in the paradigms on which it is based.

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We Act, Therefore We Think

Climate disinformation thrives not only because someone produces it, but also because it can justify individual behavior. AI accelerates the production of these plausible, but sometimes false justifications, so responding with evidence alone may not be enough.

Many people believe that the climate crisis can be addressed with more evidence and better arguments. The assumption is that, if high-quality information were presented effectively, the necessary changes would be adopted with less resistance. However, this presupposes an interest in the truth, an interest that is not always guaranteed, at least not in the way it is usually considered.

We imagine that disinformation always originates with someone who is advancing an agenda or manipulating reality to fit a desired narrative they want us to believe. Although vested interests are often involved, a lie may also be shared simply because it generates clicks, money, influence, a sense of belonging, or the pleasure of irritating others so that they share it. Willingness to lie matters, but so does the availability of an audience ready to receive the lie.

→ When disinformation justifies inaction, responding with data addresses the consequence rather than the underlying cause.

The problem is that taking the evidence on the climate crisis seriously confronts us with the need to give up certain comforts. “Saving the planet” requires effort: washing and reusing items instead of discarding them, choosing a bicycle or public transportation instead of a car, and avoiding certain foods.

Accepting this evidence may mean changing how we live and demanding more sustainable policies and production models. Such transformations tend to impose immediate costs on individuals while delivering collective benefits later. Individual incentives and environmental well-being are often misaligned, making it easier for people to ignore the environmental costs of their actions.

Contrary to what we might expect, we usually take action and then rationalize our actions rather than thinking first and then acting. Moreover, when we are shown evidence that goes against our attitudes, we tend to adapt our ideas to justify the attitudes instead of changing the attitudes to align to our ideas. That is why we rely on the arguments that justify our actions and distrust those that would make us act differently.

→ Taking the evidence on the climate crisis seriously confronts us with the need to give up certain comforts.

AI as an Accelerant

Although automation and artificial intelligence did not create this problem, they accelerate it. There is not yet enough evidence that language models systematically reproduce scientific misinformation; in fact, they generally reflect the scientific consensus on controversial topics. However, when these tools are combined with distribution systems capable of producing plausible images and videos at scale, in addition to confirmation bias, there can be tangible consequences. In Australia, for example, AI-generated or AI-manipulated images of dead whales among wind turbines fueled campaigns against offshore wind-energy projects.

When disinformation justifies inaction, responding with data addresses the consequence rather than the underlying cause. Instead, working with the incentives themselves or with how we present the future that climate action could bring about could encourage people to help build a future they want to be part of. A person can support a measure without first changing their minds as to why it is necessary.

Some experiments have found that among people who are unconvinced that humans caused climate change, framing mitigation measures in terms of their social, economic, or technological benefits generates a stronger intention to act than focusing the message on avoiding climate risks.

Artificial intelligence does not make the truth inaccessible, but it can surround behaviors with arguments, images, and testimony that appear credible. Addressing the climate crisis will therefore require more than defending what is true, it will also require aligning incentives so that taking action becomes desirable.

ALEJO DI RISIO

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The Machine that Undoes Possibilities: Effects of Artificial Intelligence in the Imaginaries of Future Environment Scenarios

The widespread use of chatbots is limiting political imagination. When the narrative used to envision the future becomes more homogeneous, there is less room for creativity, and less chance of achieving what seems unlikely. Amid the environmental and social crisis, recovering linguistic diversity and expanding the boundaries of what is possible have become political necessities.

The widespread use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools is changing the cultural landscape around us. Screens are increasingly filled with mass-produced images that lack a distinct identity. A trained eye can often detect the absence of humanity, and the recognizable style of chatbots, AI-based virtual assistants that respond to specific instructions and can be used for a wide range of purposes.

The lack of imagination to open up horizons in unlikely possibilities affects the crisis of our capacity to envision long-term futures. In turn, it directly affects the agenda of designing environmental and socially just transitions in response to the polycrisis. The influence of chatbots can be examined through three closely intertwined fields: environmental policy, the study of future possibilities, and cultural imaginaries.

Toward the Homogenization of Future Imaginaries

Our imaginaries of the future stem from the interaction with the culture we inhabit. According to studies published in *Science Adviser* and *Nature*, the interaction and coproduction of sense with chatbots is making this cultural tapestry more homogeneous. Because of how language models work, they produce statistical averages of the information that has been fed to them. They are incapable of producing radical innovation; quite on the contrary, they produce meaning built through an average of the data that was fed to them.

At the same time, the ideology behind these chatbots is rarely analyzed. But these algorithmic averages are deeply ideological. As Donna Haraway argues, data production already anticipates what will be observed, how it will be measured, which categories will be used and what processes will become visible when studied and quantified. Therefore, information, even when raw, already has a political and cultural dimension, even when this same thing is ignored by the person researching. At the same time, software engineers who work in these companies choose what answers they deem preferable and input rules of behavior determined by their own values.

→ The interaction and coproduction of meanings with chatbots is making the cultural tapestry where our imaginaries of the future reside more homogeneous.

Tech Magnates Want to Homogenize our Future

According to technology researcher Cecilia Rikap, the companies behind chatbots are seeking to establish themselves as the dominant actors shaping the future: setting its direction according to their own interests and ideologies while controlling information and knowledge. People who rely on chatbots to communicate their ideas risk having those ideas reshaped and homogenized by Silicon Valley's ideology. Tech magnates' promises for the future combine technological solutionism with an extreme concentration of wealth and power; they escape from catastrophe, even if that means leaving the rest of humanity behind. Their response to the climate crisis is to profit from it.

→ The grammar, vocabulary, and language range used to narrate the environmental context are also shortened.

These imaginaries have direct effects on the present. They can help enable structural changes in environmental contexts, or make those changes socially urgent. When the diversity and ambition of desirable future images shrink, collective programs and agendas also become less ambitious, less original, and more conservative.

The grammar, vocabulary, and language range used to narrate the environmental context are also shortened, as an article published in *Nature Human Behavior* shows. Homogenization reaches academic, journalistic and fiction writing. Creation is a muscle that has to be exercised and, like any other muscle, it can atrophy if it lacks practice. Part of the creative process is navigating the task of decanting an idea in communicable and dialogic formats. Trying to cut that process will only result in those ideas being more alike to those that chatbots try to provide as results. Structures and notions of the development models based on the infinite growth that has brought us to this age of polycrisis are reproduced.

As humanity navigates a crisis of meaning, intercultural dialogue and collaboration become essential to imagining possibilities and proposals capable of overcoming this cultural impoverishment. Diverse ways of inhabiting and understanding the world can expand these horizons. Perspectives from evolutionary biology, Indigenous peoples, and interspecies ethics allow us to imagine multidimensional ways of responding to the polycrisis that include other non-anthropocentric identity relationships with territory, and that encourage multidimensional everyday practices of care. What can chatbots reflect upon these ways of thinking?

At a time when the climate and environmental crisis demands action at scale, we must expand the boundaries of what is politically possible until they encompass what is environmentally necessary. We must seek answers, coordinates, and paths beyond the average. Exercising the art of language is more necessary than ever in communication, culture, and politics. Re-enchanting the world to reconnect ourselves with meanings that make it possible. Inhabiting local, regional, and intercultural languages, and imagining what does not yet exist to find a way out of these dilemmas. Changing who we are as the starting point for transforming what we do in the world and building social and environmental transitions at scale.



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