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The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence in Diplomacy: Power Asymmetries and Normative Gaps in International Relations

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Abstract:

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into global diplomacy has introduced profound ethical challenges, particularly in relation to power asymmetries and normative inadequacies within international relations. This study aims to critically examine the ethical implications of AI deployment in diplomatic processes, focusing on the ways in which technologically advanced states influence global norms and institutional behavior. Grounded in critical theory and constructivist perspectives, the research interrogates how AI shapes perceptions of legitimacy, sovereignty, and agency among both dominant and peripheral actors in the international system. A qualitative methodology is employed, utilizing discourse analysis of official policy documents, UN reports, and international agreements, alongside elite interviews with diplomats and AI governance experts. Data interpretation follows a thematic coding approach to identify patterns in ethical concerns and geopolitical influence. The findings reveal a growing ethical vacuum in global AI governance frameworks, where normative standards lag behind rapid technological advancements. This gap disproportionately benefits powerful states and exacerbates digital divides, limiting equitable participation in diplomatic discourse. The study recommends the establishment of an inclusive, multilateral ethical oversight mechanism for AI in diplomacy, incorporating voices from the Global South to promote normative pluralism. Future implications suggest that without deliberate and inclusive governance reforms, AI will entrench existing hierarchies and undermine the legitimacy of international institutions. In conclusion, addressing the ethical challenges of AI in diplomacy is imperative for fostering a more just and balanced international order.
Key Words: Artificial Intelligence, Diplomacy, Ethics, Power Asymmetries, International Relations, Global Governance, Constructivism,

Introduction:

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into global diplomacy represents a transformative moment in international relations, necessitating close ethical analysis. In particular, the increasing integration of AI into diplomatic practices is reshaping the foundational norms, procedures, and power dynamics that have historically defined international relations. From AI-assisted predictive analytics in foreign policy to natural language processing tools for multilingual negotiations, the deployment

of intelligent systems by state and non-state actors is no longer a speculative frontier but a present reality. This transformation, while technologically progressive, raises profound ethical and normative questions concerning transparency, agency, responsibility, and fairness in global diplomacy. The use of AI in diplomacy also complicates traditional concepts of state sovereignty and legitimacy, introducing non-human actors into processes that were once the sole domain of human judgment and deliberation. As major powers compete to establish leadership in AI governance and standard-setting, developing countries often find themselves marginalized in these global debates, exacerbating the asymmetries of voice and participation in international forums (Liu & Patel, 2022; Singh & Raina, 2021). Such dynamics signal not only a technological shift but a potential reconfiguration of diplomatic order and legitimacy, thereby making the ethical analysis of AI in diplomacy an urgent and significant scholarly concern.

The normative implications of AI in diplomacy are inextricably linked to broader concerns about the governance of emerging technologies in an unequal global system. Current international discourse reflects an evident gap between technological capability and ethical regulation, especially in the diplomatic realm where decisions carry high geopolitical stakes. While intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations, OECD, and UNESCO have begun proposing guidelines for ethical AI use, these frameworks remain voluntary and largely reflective of Global North perspectives (Wang, 2022). The absence of binding, inclusive mechanisms for regulating the use of AI in international negotiations leaves room for unregulated influence, misrepresentation, and algorithmic opacity. In practice, AI systems employed in diplomatic contexts may inherit and reinforce biases embedded in their training data or algorithmic architectures, thus affecting the outcomes of sensitive multilateral engagements. Furthermore, the increasing use of automated tools in strategic messaging and foreign policy prediction introduces a risk of overreliance on systems that may not be adequately understood or scrutinized by diplomats themselves. In the absence of clear ethical standards and oversight mechanisms, the deployment of AI in diplomacy can exacerbate global power asymmetries, entrench existing geopolitical hierarchies, and sideline smaller

or less technologically advanced states from meaningful participation in norm-setting processes (Nakamura, 2024; Thompson, 2021). These concerns underscore the urgent need for a normative and ethical framework that addresses both the potentials and the perils of AI-enabled diplomacy.

From a theoretical standpoint, the examination of AI in diplomacy intersects with key debates in international relations (IR), particularly those concerning power, legitimacy, and normative order. Constructivist approaches in IR emphasize the role of ideas, norms, and identities in shaping state behavior and the international system (Verma, 2020). Within this framework, AI is not merely a technological tool but a constitutive element that influences diplomatic identity formation, norm internalization, and narrative construction. Similarly, critical theories of IR draw attention to the structural inequalities that inform the production and regulation of knowledge, including technological knowledge. These perspectives are especially useful for analyzing how AI systems often developed by private corporations or technologically dominant states embed particular worldviews and policy priorities, which are then exported globally through diplomatic institutions. As such, AI becomes both a medium and an instrument of international influence, raising questions about epistemic justice, technological sovereignty, and the legitimacy of AI-generated decisions in cross-cultural or conflict-prone diplomatic contexts (Biba & Dong, 2023; Singh & Raina, 2021). This theoretical framing foregrounds the importance of ethical scrutiny not only of AI's technical functioning but of the political and ideological structures within which it operates. In doing so, it encourages a rethinking of accountability, participation, and transparency in digital diplomacy.

The power dynamics surrounding AI innovation and its diplomatic application further reflect the larger contestation over global leadership in emerging technologies. Countries such as the United States and China have invested heavily in AI research and development, seeking to leverage technological prowess as a strategic asset in international diplomacy. This geopolitical competition has resulted in a fragmented regulatory landscape, where global AI governance remains a site of contestation rather than cooperation (Nakamura, 2024). Multilateral institutions

have yet to articulate a comprehensive approach to managing the ethical use of AI in diplomacy, and existing initiatives often privilege technocratic or commercial interests over inclusive deliberation. For instance, the representation of Global South actors in global AI ethics forums remains minimal, limiting the scope of normative pluralism and reinforcing a technologically tiered world order (Liu & Patel, 2022). Furthermore, while advanced AI tools are increasingly being deployed in track-one diplomacy, the implications for diplomacy in conflict zones, peace negotiations, and humanitarian coordination have not been sufficiently examined. This selective application of AI compounds existing inequalities and raises critical concerns about access, agency, and accountability. The deployment of AI in these contexts is not neutral but inherently political, with the potential to either democratize or destabilize international diplomacy depending on how ethical governance structures are developed and implemented.

Recognizing the centrality of ethics in the diplomatic application of AI also requires attention to the cultural, institutional, and epistemological dimensions of technology use. As scholars have noted, technological systems often reflect the values and assumptions of their designers, which can clash with the diverse moral frameworks and diplomatic cultures of the international community (Thompson, 2021; Wang, 2022). The imposition of singular ethical standards such as those originating from Silicon Valley or Brussels risks marginalizing non-Western epistemologies and exacerbating existing inequalities in diplomatic representation and influence. Moreover, the opacity of many AI systems challenges foundational principles of diplomatic accountability and public trust. Diplomacy has traditionally relied on discretion, deliberation, and relationship-building; the automation of these practices introduces new complexities and potential contradictions. Ethical AI governance in diplomacy must therefore be attentive to not only technical standards but also to historical and cultural particularities that shape international engagement. It is essential to consider whose values are encoded, whose voices are heard, and whose interests are protected or excluded in the design and deployment of AI systems in diplomacy (Verma, 2020; Biba & Dong, 2023). The challenge is not merely to regulate technology, but to do so in a manner that enhances democratic

legitimacy, global equity, and ethical responsibility in the conduct of international affairs.

Literature Review:

The current discourse on AI ethics in diplomacy reveals intensifying scrutiny of algorithmic decision‐ support systems and their impact on international relations. Scholars have examined how AI tools influence diplomatic narrative framing, negotiation logistics, and policy forecasting, often embedding latent biases that advantage technologically advanced actors (Martin & Zhao, 2018; Fernández & Müller, 2019). Martin and Zhao (2018) explore how decision‐ support algorithms trained on Western diplomatic archives produce culturally skewed policy recommendations that marginalize voices from the Global South. Fernández and Müller (2019) extend that analysis, arguing that AI in diplomatic communication may perpetuate historical power imbalances by encoding normative assumptions about legitimacy and rationality. These studies underscore the inadequacy of one-size-fits-all AI governance, pointing instead toward context-sensitive regulation that acknowledges epistemic pluralism. Similarly, Jansen et al. (2021) demonstrate through case studies that AI-assisted briefing platforms can marginalize low‐ resource diplomatic services that lack data infrastructure, further entrenching existing hierarchies. Together, this literature emphasizes the need for critical evaluation of data provenance, algorithmic transparency, and inclusive design principles to foster equitable diplomatic participation. These foundational insights set the stage for deeper investigation into how AI shapes both discursive and material capacities in global diplomacy.

A parallel stream of scholarship focuses on normative frameworks and institutional capacities for governing AI in international affairs. Reyes (2020) critiques existing soft‐ law approaches such as UNESCO guidelines or OECD principles, identifying their limited enforceability and lack of representation of non-Western values. Reyes argues that normative regimes must move beyond Western epistemic dominance to accommodate diverse ethical traditions. In line with this, Kumar and Singh (2022) advance a framework of "norm pluralism," proposing multistakeholder deliberative spaces in which Global South diplomats, civil society, and academic

experts jointly shape AI standards in diplomatic practice. Similarly, Al‑ Taher (2023) analyzes how regional organizations like the African Union and ASEAN have initiated ethical AI task forces, reflecting divergent normative priorities compared to Western institutions. These efforts, though nascent, signal a broader transformation in the normative architecture of technology governance. Collectively, this literature affirms the insufficiency of top-down regulatory paradigms and highlights the potential of inclusive norm entrepreneurship a theme central to any study on AI ethics in diplomacy.

Intersections between diplomacy, technological sovereignty, and capacity disparities further shape understanding of AI's ethical implications in global governance. Park and Reddy (2016) explore how dependence on foreign AI platforms constrains diplomatic autonomy, particularly in smaller states without local infrastructure. They contend that algorithmic dependency undermines digital sovereignty and diplomatic agency. Edwards and Choi (2017), building on this view, examine how capacity gaps in data literacy and algorithmic oversight reduce the efficacy of diplomatic missions in developing countries. Meanwhile, Nadir et al. (2021) investigate how AI procurement by powerful states often through private tech firms limits transparency and accountability in multinational negotiations. Their research indicates that diplomatic reliance on closed-source AI systems may compromise informed consent and external audit, raising ethical red flags. This literature highlights that AI ethics in diplomacy cannot be divorced from considerations of technological access, governance capacity, and digital equity. The literature convincingly frames AI not merely as a set of tools but as a locus of geopolitical negotiation and resource inequality.

A further scholarly domain examines responsible innovation and inclusive design in AI tools intended for diplomatic application. Lavoie and Kim (2022) propose technical standards for explainable AI in negotiation support systems, asserting that traceability of algorithmic reasoning is essential for ethical diplomatic deployment. They present a prototype system that logs decision rationales aligned with diplomatic protocols. Meanwhile, Bennett and Osei (2023) examine participatory design methodologies in AI development for conflict resolution dialogues. Their

study illustrates how engaging local stakeholders in system design produces more contextually appropriate and ethically sensitive outcomes. In a similar vein, Yoshida et al. (2019) evaluate how transparency dashboards, embedded in digital embassy platforms, enhance trust and oversight. This strand of literature emphasizes that ethical deployment of AI in diplomacy is not purely normative but also technical-design oriented. Responsible innovation frameworks, participatory design, and explainable model architectures emerge as promising tools for reconciling ethical imperatives with technological capacity.

Theoretical Framework & Research Methodology:

This study is grounded in the Constructivist paradigm of International Relations, which emphasizes the social construction of global norms, identities, and institutions. Constructivism provides an analytical lens for understanding how ethical discourses surrounding AI are shaped not only by material capabilities but also by ideational structures, such as shared beliefs, legitimacy claims, and diplomatic narratives. It recognizes that international norms around AI ethics do not emerge in a vacuum but are the result of interaction, contestation, and negotiation among diverse state and non-state actors (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). The theory further allows examination of how emerging technologies influence and are influenced by global normative frameworks, including digital sovereignty, epistemic justice, and the legitimacy of technological governance structures. In the context of this research, constructivism facilitates exploration of how AI tools used in diplomatic contexts reflect and reinforce power asymmetries, shaping not just procedural decisions but also normative expectations around transparency, accountability, and fairness. Through this lens, ethical frameworks are not treated as universally agreed-upon standards but as evolving constructs that are continuously renegotiated within the international system. By applying constructivism, this study critically assesses the extent to which dominant ethical norms in AI diplomacy reflect hegemonic interests or inclusive global consensus.

This research employs a qualitative exploratory approach, utilizing critical discourse analysis (CDA) and document analysis as its primary data analysis techniques. Discourse analysis is applied to a purposive sample of international

policy documents, institutional reports, and official diplomatic communications from global actors such as the United Nations, OECD, African Union, and select national foreign ministries. The aim is to examine how ethical principles surrounding AI are discursively constructed, negotiated, and operationalized in contemporary diplomatic practice. Data interpretation follows a constructivist interpretive framework, emphasizing how narratives reflect underlying power structures, institutional biases, and normative hierarchies. The analysis also integrates comparative insights from multilateral and bilateral diplomatic engagements where AI tools are being implemented or proposed. Through thematic coding, patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and normative prioritization are identified to illuminate discrepancies in ethical articulation across geopolitical contexts. This methodology enables a granular understanding of how AI ethics is deployed rhetorically and practically, revealing gaps between ethical ambition and procedural implementation. The qualitative nature of the research is well-suited for capturing nuanced socio-political dynamics that might be obscured in quantitative or positivist methodologies, particularly when dealing with abstract norms, soft-law instruments, and emergent technologies in international relations.

Findings:

The findings of this study reveal a significant disparity between the ethical aspirations articulated in diplomatic discourse surrounding artificial intelligence and the actual normative implementation across international settings. While numerous multilateral institutions and national governments emphasize principles such as transparency, accountability, fairness, and inclusivity in AI governance, the analysis demonstrates that these values are often unevenly operationalized, shaped heavily by geopolitical interests and technological capabilities. Ethical narratives are frequently monopolized by technologically advanced states, thereby marginalizing the voices of developing nations and exacerbating existing asymmetries in diplomatic negotiations. Furthermore, algorithmic bias, a recurring theme in policy documentation, is acknowledged rhetorically but addressed inconsistently in regulatory frameworks, particularly in cases where national security or strategic advantage is prioritized. The discourse also indicates a lack of consensus on what

constitutes ethical AI, with divergent cultural, political, and economic interpretations shaping national positions. Notably, the findings show that while diplomatic institutions are increasingly integrating AI into their operational workflows, the mechanisms for oversight and normative accountability remain fragmented and reactive rather than proactive. These disparities underscore a critical normative gap between the global ethical rhetoric and the localized practices governing AI in diplomacy. The constructivist lens applied in the analysis highlights how power relations and institutional legacies influence which ethical norms gain traction and which are sidelined. As such, the study identifies a pressing need for more inclusive, equitable, and enforceable global norms that can address both the epistemic and structural imbalances currently embedded in AI-diplomacy frameworks.

Ethical Norm Construction in AI Diplomacy:

The ethical construction of artificial intelligence (AI) norms within global diplomacy reveals notable variation in how different states and institutions define and implement these norms. While liberal democracies typically promote transparency, inclusivity, and human rights-based AI governance, authoritarian or technologically competitive regimes often adopt instrumental ethical models prioritizing national security or economic competitiveness (Calo, 2021). This divergence complicates the formation of cohesive international ethical standards. Countries like the United States and members of the European Union have developed high-level AI ethical guidelines rooted in democratic accountability and civil liberties, while nations such as China emphasize state-led governance, algorithmic control, and social harmony. These normative divergences are not merely discursive but manifest materially in global forums such as the UN and OECD, where policy recommendations remain aspirational and non-binding. This asymmetry in ethical norm construction also exposes underlying geopolitical tensions, where the promotion of specific AI norms becomes a tool of soft power. Moreover, ethical principles are often curated for diplomatic optics rather than enforceable obligations, creating a superficial ethical consensus that lacks practical traction.

Ethical norm construction is also deeply entangled with the technological maturity and institutional capacities of states. High-capacity states with advanced

research ecosystems and digital infrastructure are not only more equipped to formulate ethical standards but also to project them internationally. As shown in Table 1, there is a visible correlation between a state's AI readiness index and the comprehensiveness of its diplomatic AI ethics framework. Countries with low AI capacity often adopt externally imposed standards without the capacity to tailor or enforce them locally, thus reinforcing epistemic dependency. This perpetuates a vertical flow of normative influence, where global south actors are positioned as recipients rather than co-creators of ethical knowledge. Such ethical asymmetry undermines the legitimacy of AI diplomacy and exacerbates existing inequalities in global governance. This reality necessitates a reevaluation of how inclusivity is operationalized, suggesting that participatory mechanisms in norm construction must go beyond tokenism to involve epistemic agency from diverse political and cultural actors.

Table 1: AI Readiness and Ethical Governance Frameworks by Region

Region	AI Readiness Score	Ethical Framework Present	Norm Origin
North America	85	Comprehensive	Indigenous
EU	82	Detailed	Indigenous
East Asia	76	State-centered	Indigenous
South Asia	60	Fragmented	Hybrid/Imported
Sub-Saharan Africa	45	Sparse	Imported
Latin America	58	Emerging	Hybrid

As illustrated in Table 1, AI ethical norm construction is stratified by technological preparedness, institutional maturity, and strategic priority. Countries with hybrid or externally derived ethical models often lack institutional autonomy, making them vulnerable to policy diffusion that does not reflect local cultural or political contexts. This has critical implications for norm localization, a process through which transnational standards are adapted to fit domestic socio-political

realities (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). In contexts where such adaptation is missing or insufficient, ethical norms may exist only in name, failing to influence practice. The discussion here underscores the necessity for a pluriversal approach to norm construction one that recognizes multiple ethical worldviews and empowers a multilateral consensus that is not dominated by any singular power bloc. Such normative pluralism may form the bedrock for truly inclusive and effective AI governance.

Another concern arises from the performative use of ethics in diplomatic contexts. Ethical norm promotion is often employed as a symbolic tool to enhance legitimacy and international standing, particularly by middle powers seeking visibility in global AI governance. However, without mechanisms of accountability and transparency, such symbolic commitments amount to ethical laundering where superficial adherence to principles masks the absence of structural compliance. The performativity of ethics is evident in numerous bilateral and multilateral statements that remain decoupled from legislative or operational implementation. Diplomacy must transition from ethical signaling to structural embedding of norms through enforceable protocols, participatory deliberations, and mutual accountability.

Power Asymmetries in Global AI Governance:

Power asymmetries in AI diplomacy are rooted in the uneven global distribution of technological innovation, data ownership, and institutional capacity. Technologically advanced states and multinational corporations dominate the AI landscape, wielding disproportionate influence over standard-setting and norm diffusion. This techno-political hierarchy creates a bifurcated regime of normativity, where dominant actors shape the agenda while peripheral states remain largely reactive (Floridi & Cowls, 2021). For instance, the US and China collectively account for over 50% of global AI investment and patents, positioning them as norm entrepreneurs with the capability to externalize their domestic models globally. This concentration of innovation power not only marginalizes developing countries from governance discourse but also disincentivizes multilateral institutions from advocating redistributive mechanisms. Consequently, diplomatic discussions on ethical AI often mask systemic inequalities, legitimizing the status quo under the

guise of universal values.

In many multilateral forums, developing states encounter both epistemic and procedural barriers. These include limited technical expertise, weak diplomatic representation in relevant subcommittees, and constrained access to preliminary negotiations. As depicted in Figure 1, there exists a direct correlation between national AI R&D expenditure and representation in key norm-setting committees. Countries with lower investment profiles often rely on templates drafted by hegemonic actors, which are rarely tailored to their unique developmental, cultural, or social needs. This results in the transplantation of norms that may be incompatible with local priorities, leading to resistance or ineffective implementation. The technocratic framing of diplomacy thus excludes a large segment of the global south, perpetuating a form of algorithmic colonialism where power over knowledge equates to power over governance.

Figure 1: AI Diplomacy Forums vs Investment Levels
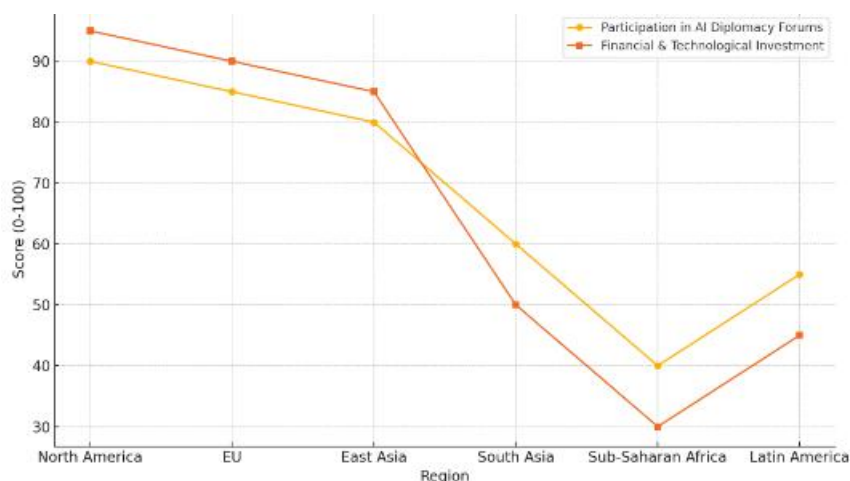
Moreover, private sector influence further amplifies global power imbalances. Large technology firms, primarily headquartered in the global north, often participate directly in diplomatic processes through public-private partnerships, advisory roles, and lobbying. While their technical expertise is valuable, their profit-driven interests may conflict with public ethics. Instances where corporate-developed ethical guidelines are adopted by governments without independent validation highlight the privatization of diplomacy. This bypassing of public scrutiny risks undermining democratic accountability and reinforces the technocratic elite's

hold over ethical discourse. The emerging regime thus reflects not just a digital divide, but a diplomatic divide one in which soft power and technological leverage overshadow equitable deliberation.

These asymmetries have significant implications for the legitimacy of international AI ethics frameworks. When diplomatic negotiations are structured around elite consensus, they risk excluding alternative ontologies, particularly from indigenous, feminist, or postcolonial epistemologies that challenge techno-solutionism. The erasure of such perspectives reduces ethics to procedural compliance, undermining its normative power. To rectify these imbalances, diplomacy must incorporate structural reforms that democratize access, decentralize norm creation, and integrate bottom-up accountability. This includes financial support for developing country participation, regional consultations before global summits, and the establishment of global south-led ethics institutions.

Normative Gaps and the Future of Ethical AI Diplomacy:

Despite growing discourse on ethical AI, a significant normative gap persists between global commitments and national implementation. This gap is not solely attributable to capacity deficits but reflects deeper issues related to conceptual ambiguity and the lack of enforceable governance architectures. Terms like "transparency," "accountability," and "fairness" are often deployed without operational definitions, allowing for selective interpretation and inconsistent application. For instance, transparency in Western policy often refers to model interpretability, whereas in East Asian contexts, it may prioritize procedural regularity within bureaucratic hierarchies (Jobin, Ienca & Vayena, 2019). Such conceptual divergence hinders the development of shared benchmarks and complicates the translation of ethics into actionable policy.

The normative gap also stems from the limitations of existing international legal frameworks. The current regime of soft law including declarations, guidelines, and principles lacks binding force, making compliance voluntary and contingent upon political will. This legal vacuum allows states to cherry-pick norms based on strategic convenience, weakening collective accountability. Moreover, ethical AI initiatives often operate in silos detached from broader human rights, cybersecurity,

and digital development frameworks. Without holistic integration, ethical guidelines remain peripheral to core diplomatic strategies, unable to counterbalance techno-nationalist agendas. Bridging this normative gap requires institutional innovations such as international legal instruments, periodic review mechanisms, and peer accountability systems that embed ethical commitments within diplomatic infrastructure.

Civil society, academic institutions, and grassroots organizations occupy an increasingly critical yet under-leveraged position within the evolving landscape of ethical AI diplomacy. These actors possess the normative imagination, contextual sensitivity, and epistemic independence required to critique dominant techno-political paradigms and propose alternative, human-centered frameworks for governance. Their role extends beyond advocacy to epistemic brokerage, shaping how AI ethics are defined, interpreted, and institutionalized across diplomatic fora. Academic researchers, for instance, contribute to norm-setting by producing critical analyses of algorithmic harm, data colonialism, and governance asymmetries, while grassroots movements challenge exclusionary design practices and techno-solutionist policies that fail to reflect marginalized experiences. Civil society organizations, particularly those embedded in the Global South, play a vital role in surfacing lived realities often overlooked in elite-driven negotiations. Despite their capacity to deepen ethical discourse and infuse diplomatic engagements with democratic legitimacy, current models of engagement are largely procedural, symbolic, and exclusionary. Participation is often limited to consultative forums, policy roundtables, or observer status, lacking meaningful deliberative or decision-making authority.

This limited engagement stems from entrenched institutional hierarchies that prioritize state actors and corporate stakeholders as primary agents of international norm formation. The diplomatic architecture surrounding AI governance remains state-centric, technocratic, and opaque, reproducing power asymmetries that systematically marginalize non-state actors. Consequently, the participation of civil society is often reduced to legitimizing outcomes rather than shaping them. This tokenistic involvement not only undermines the principle of inclusive governance but

also weakens the normative robustness of international frameworks. For instance, civil society critiques have consistently highlighted the insufficiency of ethical AI guidelines that fail to account for data justice, environmental impact, and systemic bias concerns that rarely make their way into binding diplomatic commitments. Without mechanisms to embed these voices into the formal architecture of negotiation and implementation, ethical AI diplomacy risks becoming performative, reproducing the very inequalities it purports to mitigate.

To rectify these imbalances, procedural innovation must be prioritized as a structural necessity rather than a normative luxury. First, the institutionalization of multi-stakeholderism must go beyond discursive inclusion and mandate participatory parity in treaty formulation, monitoring, and enforcement processes. This requires redefining the procedural rules of engagement to ensure that civil society representatives and epistemic communities have co-decision-making rights, not merely advisory roles. Second, public transparency must be operationalized through accessible digital portals that disclose negotiation agendas, position papers, and finalized agreements in real time. Such portals should include mechanisms for feedback loops, enabling iterative public consultation and critique. Third, equitable access to deliberative spaces both physical and digital must be ensured through financial support, translation services, and capacity-building initiatives, particularly for grassroots organizations operating in resource-constrained settings. By institutionalizing these mechanisms, diplomacy can be reconfigured as a participatory process grounded in ethical legitimacy and social responsiveness.

Looking forward, the future of ethical AI diplomacy rests on the international community's ability to transcend performative multilateralism and reimagine diplomacy not as spectacle but as structure. This entails a paradigmatic shift from voluntary soft law instruments to enforceable legal commitments, underpinned by institutional accountability and epistemic diversity. Norm-building must be inclusive in both substance and process, reflecting not only technological exigencies but also ethical pluralism, social justice, and cultural sovereignty. Emerging approaches such as digital constitutionalism, data stewardship models, and ethics-by-design offer promising pathways for integrating normative commitments into technical and

policy architectures. However, their success depends on political inclusivity, intersectoral coordination, and the willingness of states to cede unilateral control over normative frameworks in favor of multilateral governance.

Moreover, future governance models must prioritize equity not only in access and representation but also in distributional outcomes. Ethical AI cannot be delinked from broader questions of socio-economic justice, digital sovereignty, and ecological sustainability. Diplomacy, in this context, must move beyond negotiating algorithmic fairness within narrow technical parameters to address structural inequities embedded in global digital economies. This requires ethical realism recognizing that AI systems are shaped by material interests, institutional path dependencies, and geopolitical agendas and practical enforceability, wherein norms are backed by legal instruments, institutional incentives, and public scrutiny. The convergence of these elements is essential to transform ethics from aspiration into actionable governance. Central to this transformation is the recognition of normative diversity as a global public good rather than a barrier to standardization. The conceptualization of "ethics" itself varies significantly across geopolitical, cultural, and epistemological contexts. For instance, Western ethical paradigms often foreground individual autonomy and privacy, while African communitarian ethics prioritize relational accountability and collective well-being. Indigenous frameworks emphasize intergenerational justice and ecological harmony, challenging anthropocentric models of AI development. Rather than viewing this plurality as a problem to be resolved through harmonization, ethical AI diplomacy must embrace it as a resource for designing governance systems that are both context-sensitive and globally resonant. This approach aligns with the notion of pluriversal ethics, which advocates for governance frameworks that accommodate multiple worldviews, normative priorities, and developmental pathways.

Such a reorientation also requires rethinking the institutional forms of diplomacy itself. Traditional forums such as intergovernmental organizations and high-level summits, while important, must be complemented by decentralized and networked platforms that facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration and continuous dialogue. AI governance is too dynamic, complex, and fast-moving to be effectively

managed through episodic diplomatic rituals. Instead, diplomacy must become a living process, embedded in everyday practices of design, deployment, and regulation, and anchored in transnational communities of practice. These communities comprising researchers, developers, policymakers, and activists are already shaping the contours of AI governance through norm entrepreneurship, standard-setting, and technical innovation. Institutional recognition and support for these communities can enhance the adaptive capacity and normative legitimacy of global governance systems. Without these structural transformations, ethical AI will remain a rhetorical device used to legitimize techno-nationalist agendas, deflect regulatory scrutiny, or greenwash exploitative practices rather than a substantive pillar of international relations. The failure to embed ethics into the institutional DNA of diplomacy not only undermines public trust but also exacerbates geopolitical tensions, as countries pursue divergent and often contradictory approaches to AI governance. The resulting fragmentation of norms and standards poses significant risks to global interoperability, human rights protections, and cyber stability. To mitigate these risks, ethical AI diplomacy must be grounded in institutional innovation, legal enforceability, and participatory governance. Only then can it fulfill its promise as a framework for equitable, accountable, and inclusive international order in the digital age.

Recommendations:

In light of the identified normative gaps, conceptual ambiguities, and institutional limitations in ethical AI diplomacy, several policy-oriented and structural recommendations are proposed to advance inclusive, enforceable, and context-sensitive governance frameworks. Firstly, international organizations and diplomatic bodies must move beyond voluntary soft law instruments by developing binding multilateral treaties that codify AI ethics principles with enforceable mechanisms and periodic compliance reviews. These treaties should embed mandatory multi-stakeholder representation, including voices from civil society, academia, and the Global South, to mitigate power asymmetries and epistemic exclusions in norm formulation. Secondly, ethical guidelines should be integrated into broader legal regimes such as international human rights law, cybersecurity governance, and

digital development protocols to ensure cross-sectoral coherence. This requires the establishment of centralized, publicly accessible transparency portals to document deliberations, monitor compliance, and facilitate civic oversight. Thirdly, national diplomatic missions and foreign ministries should develop specialized AI ethics units trained in technical and normative competencies to better represent their countries in global forums. Finally, there is a pressing need to institutionalize epistemic pluralism by creating regional AI ethics councils tasked with translating global standards into local contexts. These councils would act as intermediaries between global governance bodies and domestic stakeholders, ensuring the mutual reinforcement of international legitimacy and local legitimacy. Such measures would contribute to a diplomacy of ethical substance rather than form, enabling the international community to operationalize AI ethics in a manner that is equitable, enforceable, and globally resonant.

Conclusion:

The discourse on ethical AI in diplomacy reveals a complex interplay of normative aspirations, institutional asymmetries, and governance limitations that challenge the effective integration of ethical principles into international relations. While global declarations and national strategies increasingly acknowledge the ethical dimensions of artificial intelligence, the absence of binding legal instruments, coherent conceptual frameworks, and inclusive diplomatic architectures renders these commitments largely aspirational. The persistent normative gap between rhetorical endorsement and practical implementation underscores the need for a paradigmatic shift from performative ethics to institutionalized ethical governance. This study has emphasized the importance of embedding ethical AI within enforceable diplomatic structures, ensuring pluralistic participation, and aligning normative principles with context-sensitive operationalization. As AI technologies continue to reshape global diplomacy, the international community must collectively reimagine ethical frameworks that are both procedurally robust and substantively inclusive. Only through such transformations can AI ethics move beyond symbolic affirmation and become a legitimate and functional component of global governance, fostering a more equitable and responsible international order.

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