

Exploring the Role of Artificial Intelligence in Public Administration

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Abstract

In nowadays, governments worldwide are adopting artificial intelligence to improve public sector operations. Artificial Intelligence can support improving decision-making processes, increase efficiency, automate routine processes, and enable predictive analytics for policy planning. The main purpose of this research paper is to examine how artificial intelligence is being used across different levels of governance, drawing on theoretical models and practical examples from several countries. The analysis reviews existing research and real-world cases to show how artificial intelligence is being applied in public services, where it has improved productivity, and how it has changed the way citizens interact with government. At the same time, the paper addresses persistent barriers to artificial intelligence adoption, including algorithmic bias, lack of accountability, data privacy concerns, ethical questions, low public trust, and the need for effective regulation.

Keywords

Artificial intelligence; public administration; public services; digital transformation

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Introduction

In an age of accelerating digital transformation, artificial intelligence (AI) has become one of the most actively researched topics in public policy and administrative studies (Criado et al., 2025). As governments begin using AI, scholars need new analytical tools not just to understand what these technologies can do, but to connect their adoption to ongoing debates in public policy and administration (Criado et al., 2025). The discussion around digital transformation in government has shifted considerably in recent years, with AI moving beyond the role of a conventional IT upgrade into something that challenges how public organizations think about their work. Even if the transformative power of artificial intelligence is recognized in the public administration field (Bullock, 2019; Young et al., 2019) (Bullock et al., 2020), public service delivery continues to follow outdated models, which may reflect budgetary constraints, as most resources are allocated to the maintenance of legacy systems (Mehr, 2017).

Given the accelerating development of AI technologies, research on their use in public administration must advance accordingly (Lamovsek, 2023), but there is still insufficient consent on how AI is affecting public sector (Liu & Kim, 2018). Recent advances present real opportunities for improving public governance (Babšek et al., 2025) (Mikalef & Gupta, 2021), but this is not simply incremental improvement. AI is changing the way public sector organizations design and deliver services to citizens. Thus, the integration of digital technologies and, particularly, of artificial intelligence in the public sector is frequently described as beneficial to end users (Kuziemski & Misuraca, 2020). Considering these changes, AI is raising significant challenges for both the public authorities and citizens, particularly in terms of transparency and trust (Al-Mushayt, 2019). Bringing AI into government raises difficult questions about how institutions are structured, how services reach people, and how technology interacts with democratic values (Busuioc,

2021). All of these are sensitive aspects of integrating artificial intelligence into public administration, which makes it difficult to diagnose problems and, consequently, while creating in a black box effect (Busuioc, 2021). Taking into account the previous aspects, the main aim of the present research paper is to analyze the way artificial intelligence is being used across different levels of governance, drawing on theoretical models and practical examples from several countries.

2. Methodology

The purpose of the present research paper is to analyze the integration of AI in public administration, with focus on both opportunities and challenges across different contexts.

The study is designed as a narrative literature review complemented by an illustrative analysis of national case studies of AI deployment in public administration. The narrative review approach was considered appropriate given the rapid evolution and the multidisciplinary character of the field.

The analysis is based on a review of academic literature on AI in public administration, including peer-reviewed journal articles, and empirical studies on AI applications in governance, service delivery, and citizen engagement. In the light of these aspects, academic sources were selected based on their relevance to the topic investigated. Complementary to the theoretical framework, the paper examines case studies from several countries, in order to highlight the benefits and the problems of artificial intelligence in public administration.

The literature search was conducted using Web of Science as the primary bibliographic database, selected for its broad coverage of peer-reviewed journals in the social sciences, its citation indexing capabilities, and its commonly accepted role as a quality filter in the academic community. Search queries combined keywords related to artificial intelligence (“artificial intelligence”, “AI”, “machine learning”, “algorithmic decision-making”) with terms specific to the public sector (“public administration”, “public sector”, “government”, “public services”, “public governance”). The resulting set of sources was complemented by targeted searches of institutional publications, in particular reports issued by the European Commission to capture grey literature directly relevant to the European policy context.

3. Artificial intelligence in public administration

A comprehensive understanding of how AI affects public administration requires an analytical approach that accounts for its effects at different organizational and societal levels. To address the impact of artificial intelligence on governance, Criado et al. (2025) propose a three-level model (Figure no. 1), structured as follows: the macro level covers governance structures and regulatory frameworks; the meso level deals with public service models and organizational design; and the micro level focuses on how AI affects public sector employees and citizens (Babšek et al., 2025; Criado et al., 2025)

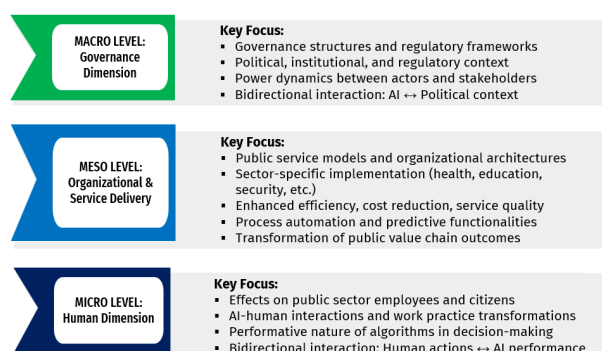


Figure no. 1. Tripartite Analytical Model of AI in Public Administration

Source: Adapted from Criado et al. (2024)

At the macro level, governance is the central concern. The impact of any technology depends on the institutional arrangements established by political actors and on their ability to address societal problems (Criado et al., 2025). Technology alone does not determine outcomes. What matters is the political, institutional, and regulatory environment in which AI is deployed.

This dimension matters because different power dynamics between actors and governance mechanisms produce different political and administrative results. National governments will shape AI-driven

governance according to their own models and priorities, influenced by stakeholder interests, regulatory requirements, and existing governance arrangements. At the same time, AI technologies carry their own logic, which interacts with each political environment in distinct ways. The relationship between AI and its political context runs in both directions (Babšek et al., 2025).

The meso level addresses how organizations and service delivery are transformed. AI affects different policy sectors in different ways, including health, education, security, defense, social policy, and transportation, and it operates at multiple administrative tiers: national, regional, and local (Criado et al., 2025). Based on these, AI integration strategies must be tailored to specific policy areas, each with its own requirements, stakeholders, and objectives. As with previous waves of technological change, AI could help governments achieve goals such as greater efficiency, lower costs, better outcomes, and higher service quality (Criado et al., 2025). AI may also enable entirely new capabilities that reshape how public services operate, from automated workflows and predictive tools to new service delivery models (Criado et al., 2025). Current research suggests these changes will be significant, but they will not progress uniformly across countries (Kuziński & Misuraca, 2020). The impact of artificial intelligence on government transformation is strongly influenced by on local conditions (Criado et al., 2025; Valle-Cruz & García-Contreras, 2025).

At the micro level, the focus shifts to people. AI-driven governance remains a fundamental human activity. AI can change how public employees do their jobs and how they interact with citizens (Criado et al., 2025). This approach highlights that AI does not operate in isolation, but it works within complex social and institutional settings where human judgment remains central. Understanding AI at this level requires examining how individuals interact with algorithmic systems, how algorithms shape those interactions, and how workplace behaviors and decision-making change as a result. Last, but not least, it is important how citizens perceive and respond to AI-driven services. The actions of both public employees and citizens influence algorithmic outcomes through ongoing feedback loops (Criado et al., 2025).

The integration of AI into government should also be understood considering broader debates about how technology and institutions interact. Building on Lenk's (2007) critique of the gap between administrative theory and technological practice, AI should be seen not just as a tool for automation, but as a force that can reshape decision-making processes and workflows in government (Lenk, 2007) (Babšek et al., 2025). From this perspective, artificial intelligence algorithms can be seen as source of information for a decision-making process (Busuioc, 2021). This challenges simplistic assumptions about technology adoption and calls for closer examination of how AI actually transforms bureaucratic systems and relationships between stakeholders.

Findings from the private sector cannot be transferred directly to government (De Sousa et al., 2019). The public sector operates under different pressures, accountability structures, and ethical expectations. Although AI offers clear opportunities to improve public services, particularly in terms of speed and quality, concerns about its expansion remain a significant barrier to adoption (Lamovsek, 2023).

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that the three levels of analysis cannot be treated as separate or self-contained. Decisions taken at the macro level – on regulation, on data governance, on the funding of AI initiatives – shape the room for manoeuvre at the meso level, where service delivery models are redesigned; and meso-level choices, in turn, determine how individual public employees and citizens interact with algorithmic systems at the micro level. For the present analysis, this implies that any assessment of AI in public administration must avoid the temptation to focus exclusively on technical performance or on isolated success stories, and must instead trace the interdependencies between regulatory frameworks, organisational design, and lived administrative practice. This integrated reading is the lens through which the case studies discussed in the following sections are examined.

4. Governance, Oversight, and Ethical Frameworks

Although scholarly interest in artificial intelligence is growing rapidly, the governance dimension remains considerably underdeveloped. While emerging AI applications hold significant potential for enhancing economic efficiency and quality of life, they simultaneously introduce unforeseen consequences and novel risks that demand systematic policy responses (Taeiagh, 2021). Effective governance and oversight are necessary for responsible AI use in public administration. Monitoring initiatives like the Public Sector Tech Watch Observatory of the European Commission help maintain ethical, transparent, and accountable AI practices while reducing risks such as data misuse and algorithmic bias (Babšek et al., 2025). These mechanisms play a critical role in detecting and addressing risks before they escalate.

The role of advisory bodies, supervisory institutions, and oversight mechanisms is central to ensuring that AI projects are carried out with integrity and transparency (Babšek et al., 2025; Zuiderwijk et al., 2021). These institutional safeguards are needed not only to prevent abuse but also to build public trust in AI-driven government functions. Systems that improve efficiency and service quality may simultaneously raise concerns about surveillance and data privacy (De Sousa et al., 2019). Government has a responsibility to ensure that AI improves administrative performance without compromising ethical standards (Babšek et al., 2025; Pencheva, et al., 2020).

The legal dimensions of AI deployment present their own challenges. AI systems must comply with legal principles not only in their design but also in their outcomes. This includes compliance with fundamental legal norms, particularly equal treatment, and the protection of basic rights (Correia et al., 2024). The requirement goes beyond technical compliance to include substantive fairness in how AI affects individuals.

Beyond maintaining adequate legal governance, each specific AI initiative will raise its own legal questions. These may involve familiar issues, such as liability for autonomous systems, as well as new complications arising from AI's use in routine legal and administrative tasks (Correia et al., 2024).

Legal frameworks typically evolve more slowly than technology. Although AI has entered the legal domain, legislation often lags behind. This delay, which can sometimes be beneficial, requires that institutions develop sufficient technical expertise to understand, design, and enforce relevant policies. Without this capacity, governments risk becoming dependent on private sector expertise, whose priorities may not align with the public interest (Correia et al., 2024).

Current administrative regulations, including those that should govern smart city initiatives, were not designed with AI in mind. This creates gaps that may require new regulatory frameworks to protect rights and freedoms. Whether or not new legislation is enacted, the deployment of smart cities must comply with the full range of existing administrative protections (Correia et al., 2024).

5. Trust, Transparency, and Public Value Considerations

The relationship between citizens and AI-driven government services depends on several interconnected factors, including trust, transparency, and the nature of the services involved. Research has revealed important differences in how people perceive and interact with AI across different contexts. For example, citizens tend to trust AI recommendations for waste management more than they trust AI advice on childcare (Aoki, 2020).

People also tend to prefer algorithmic decision-making for broad societal issues but still want to deal with a human public servant when it comes to specific, personal policy questions (Wang et al., 2025).

The mechanisms behind trust in AI systems are varied. Aoki argues that people trust AI-generated waste collection advice more than parenting guidance because they perceive these policy areas differently (Aoki, 2020). When algorithms are perceived as transparent and understandable, people tend to rate them as more trustworthy (Wang et al., 2025). Trust in AI is not uniform; it depends on context and on how clearly technology can be understood.

Trust in AI-powered government services cannot be separated from broader attitudes toward public institutions. Citizens' trust in government AI combines confidence in administration with confidence in technology itself. People may distrust AI-driven services if they distrust the government, even when they recognize that AI could be useful or that its processes are transparent (Wang et al., 2025). For policymakers, this means that building trust in AI requires addressing institutional credibility, not just technical design.

AI has a dual effect on public values. It can produce genuine improvements in productivity and efficiency, but it also creates tensions with principles like transparency, accountability, fairness, and social equity (Wang et al., 2025).

6. Applications and Capabilities of AI in Public Administration

AI is being used in a growing range of public sector functions. In policy development, neural networks and predictive models are being applied to forecast outcomes and improve resource allocation (Taeihagh, 2021). Different research shows how automated systems are transforming technical support functions by handling routine tasks, contributing to a broader shift toward evidence-based policymaking. AI is increasingly embedded in internal decision-making, service delivery, and policy design (Babšek et al., 2025; De Sousa et al., 2019; Madan & Ashok, 202; Pencheva et al., 2020).

At the European Union level, a strategic framework has been proposed for building AI capabilities in the public sector (Figure no. 2). The first dimension focuses on training: integrating AI modules into existing public sector training programs, designing learning pathways tailored to different roles across government, and building partnerships with universities and industry to develop training curricula (Medaglia et al., 2024). The second-dimension concerns research. It calls for targeted funding for applied research on AI skills in government, research consortia to study what competences are needed for effective AI use in the public sector, and mechanisms to translate research findings into policy and practice (Medaglia et al., 2024). The third dimension addresses talent. It proposes dedicated recruitment strategies for public sector AI roles, fellowship and internship programs to attract early-career professionals, and stronger connections with AI research centers to build talent pipelines (Medaglia et al., 2024). Together, these three dimensions form an integrated approach to building sustainable AI capacity in government, combining human capital development, research infrastructure, and institutional support (Medaglia et al., 2024).

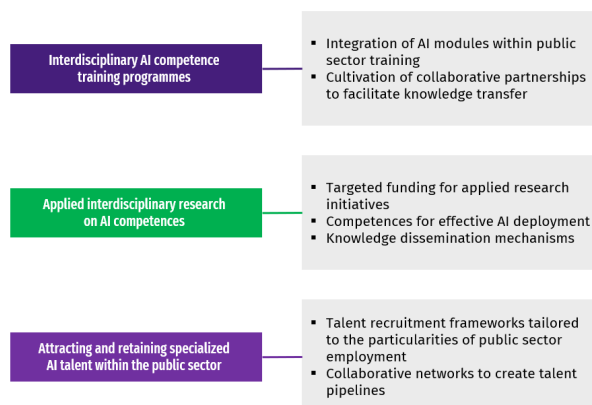


Figure no. 2. European Framework for Developing Artificial Intelligence Capabilities within the public sector

Source: Adapted from Medaglia et al. (2024)

Studies from several countries confirm these efforts with practical examples. AI has proven effective for data analysis and task automation (Young et al., 2019). Municipal governments in the UK have used AI-powered chatbots to help people navigate welfare claim processes (Wang et al., 2025). Japanese local governments have deployed automated response systems to provide guidance to residents (Aoki, 2020), (Wang et al., 2025). Regional authorities in China have implemented similar chatbot systems for answering public inquiries (Wang et al., 2025). Finland stands out as a broader model of AI governance, centering its policy not only on efficiency but explicitly on citizen wellbeing, through initiatives such as the AuroraAI, which was designed to personalize public service delivery around citizens' life events, and the MyData infrastructure, which gives individuals control over their personal data (Kuziemski & Misuraca, 2020).

The impact on delivery service has been notable. AI-powered government services show improved efficiency and responsiveness. Automated service systems have reduced processing times and provided faster responses to users (Wang et al., 2025). These improvements represent measurable gains that can increase citizen satisfaction and help government agencies do more with limited budgets.

Experimental research has confirmed broader administrative benefits. Different researchers found that digitization and AI can produce visible improvements in organizational and fiscal performance in local government. In this context, technology-enabled governance can improve resource allocation and quality of life for residents (Androniceanu & Georgescu, 2023). However, it also stressed that traditional governance mechanisms remain important and are needed to counterbalance the limitations of technology-driven approaches (Pencheva et al., 2020).

Similarly, Wirtz et al. (2019) examined AI applications in the public sector and outlined both the opportunities and challenges involved (Lamovsek, 2023; Wirtz et al., 2019).

Beyond service delivery, AI plays a growing role in security and administrative functions, including border control, real-time surveillance, identity verification, and biometric analysis. However, the ethical concerns around privacy and security require strong oversight mechanisms (Ahn & Chen, 2022; Babšek et al., 2025).

These examples do not simply illustrate that AI “works” in the public sector; they reveal a clear differentiation in the strategic ambition of national approaches. The United Kingdom, Japanese, and Chinese cases largely focus AI on transactional service delivery – chatbots, welfare navigation, public inquiries – with efficiency and responsiveness as their dominant objectives. Finland, by contrast, treats AI

as an instrument of citizen-centred governance, embedding it in a broader architecture of personal data sovereignty and life-event-driven service design. The European Union framework synthesised by Medaglia et al. (2024), in turn, shifts the level of analysis from individual applications to institutional capacity, suggesting that the durability of AI adoption depends less on isolated tools than on the alignment of training, research, and talent strategies. Linking these elements back to the research objective, the evidence supports the view that the value generated by AI in public administration is conditional: it materialises when technical capabilities are matched by deliberate choices about purpose, governance, and the human infrastructure surrounding the system.

7. Challenges, failures, and critical perspectives

The transformative potential of AI in public administration is not without its complications: alongside the opportunities, a range of critical challenges has emerged, spanning data privacy, workforce displacement, and fundamental questions of algorithmic fairness and accountability (Wirtz et al., 2020).

Wirtz et al. (2020) organize the challenges of AI in public administration into three interconnected categories (Figure no. 3). The first, AI Society, encompasses the broader social implications of AI adoption, including workforce substitution and transformation, social acceptance and trust in AI systems, and the changing nature of human-machine interaction. The second, AI Law & Regulation, addresses the legal and regulatory dimension, covering the governance of autonomous intelligence systems, questions of responsibility and accountability for algorithmic decisions, and concerns related to privacy and safety. The third category, AI Ethics, captures the fundamental ethical tensions surrounding AI, including the development of AI-driven rules for human behavior, the compatibility between machine reasoning and human value judgments, moral dilemmas arising from automated decision-making, and algorithmic discrimination. Together, these three dimensions highlight the complexity of governing AI in democratic public sector settings and underscore the need for comprehensive and adaptive regulatory frameworks (Wirtz et al., 2020).



Figure no. 3. Challenges of AI in public administration

Source: Adapted from Wirtz et al. (2020)

The discussions about artificial intelligence in public administration tend to emphasize its benefits, but a thorough assessment must also account for failures and difficulties encountered in practice. Several government AI initiatives have encountered serious obstacles, leading to some being abandoned. The most common issues involve insufficient transparency, privacy violations, algorithmic bias, and legal constraints.

Notable examples include the Dutch SyRI system for detecting welfare fraud and Poland's automated classification system for jobseekers, both criticized for violating privacy and lacking transparency (Medaglia et al., 2024). The United Kingdom's visa screening tool was discontinued because of bias and discrimination concerns (Medaglia et al., 2024). Austria's AMS job placement algorithm faced legal challenges for reinforcing socioeconomic inequalities. Surveillance projects using AI, such as sound monitoring devices and facial recognition in French schools, were found to violate data protection laws (Medaglia et al., 2024). Acknowledging these failures leads to a more realistic understanding of what AI can and cannot do in government (Babšek et al., 2025).

These failures carry important lessons. Cases like SyRI, AMS, and the UK visa tool show how AI adoption can produce unfair and legally questionable outcomes. AI should not be treated as inherently beneficial. Its effects depend on governance structures, accountability mechanisms, and the safeguards in place (Busuioc, 2021; Wirtz, et al., 2019). A realistic perspective requires acknowledging both what AI can achieve and where it has gone wrong (Babšek et al., 2025).

The gap between AI's theoretical potential and what it actually delivers in practice remains a significant concern. Wirtz et al. (2021) highlight that while AI's potential is widely discussed, its actual integration into government operations is still insufficiently understood, which underscores the need for more empirical research on implementation. Differences in research output across countries also highlight the value of international cooperation in sharing knowledge, aligning ethical standards, and ensuring that the benefits of AI are broadly accessible (Babšek et al., 2025). In this light, an effective legal framework must carefully

balance the assessment of AI's benefits and risks, enabling meaningful regulation without impeding technological progress (Scherer, 2016).

Considered together, the cases discussed in this section indicate that failures of AI in the public sector cannot be reduced to technical malfunctions. The SyRI system, the Austrian AMS algorithm, the United Kingdom's visa tool, and the AI-enabled surveillance projects in France share a common pattern: they involve sensitive policy domains (welfare, employment, migration, public security) and disproportionate impacts on already vulnerable populations. The recurring source of failure is therefore not the algorithm itself, but the institutional choice to deploy it without adequate transparency and democratic oversight. This pattern reinforces the analytical claim that runs through this paper: AI in public administration should not be evaluated as a stand-alone tool, but as part of a wider institutional configuration whose design determines whether the technology strengthens or undermines public values. Failures, in this sense, are diagnostic events that expose the gaps in governance frameworks rather than isolated accidents to be filtered out of the analysis.

Conclusions

Integrating AI into government is a complex process that goes beyond adopting new technology. AI's effects appear at multiple levels: in overarching policy and legal frameworks, in organizational structures and service models, and in day-to-day interactions between public employees, citizens, and automated systems. The evidence suggests that while AI can genuinely improve productivity, service quality, and analytical capacity in government, successful deployment depends on strong oversight, ethical governance, and careful attention to the legal and institutional context.

The evidence from both successful and failed implementations makes one point clear: the benefits of AI are neither automatic nor guaranteed. Its value depends on how it is governed, implemented, and integrated into existing institutions. The problems with transparency, accountability, bias, privacy, and legal compliance that have surfaced in various countries show why institutional safeguards and democratic values must remain central throughout digital transformation.

Going forward, the field needs more empirical research connecting theoretical potential with what actually happens when AI is deployed. International collaboration would help standardize ethical practices and share implementation lessons across borders. Most importantly, every step of AI-enabled governance should be tested against a simple question: does this strengthen or weaken the public values and rights that citizens depend on?

The main contribution of the present paper to the literature on AI in public administration lies in the deliberate placement of successful and failed implementations within a single analytical discussion. Much of the existing literature treats high-profile successes (such as Finland's AuroraAI, or municipal chatbots in the United Kingdom and Japan) separately from contested or failed deployments (such as the Dutch SyRI system, Austria's AMS algorithm, the United Kingdom's visa screening tool, or AI-enabled surveillance projects in France), with the result that either the promise or the risks of AI in the public sector tend to dominate the narrative. By discussing these cases in parallel, the paper highlights that what distinguishes successful from problematic deployments is rarely the technology itself, but the institutional context in which it is embedded – including the clarity of its purpose, the transparency of its decision logic, and the accountability mechanisms that surround it.

Several limitations of the study should nevertheless be acknowledged. The analysis relies on a narrative review of secondary sources, identified primarily through the Web of Science Core Collection, and may therefore not capture relevant contributions indexed in other databases (such as Scopus or Google Scholar) or published in languages other than English. The case studies discussed are not the result of original fieldwork – they were drawn from prior literature reviews, academic articles, and institutional reports – and their analysis depends on the depth of information available in those secondary sources.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) usage statement:

Claude (Anthropic) was used to assist with proofreading the paper and improving the language. The authors made all substantive decisions, reviewed and edited the content, and take full responsibility for the final article.

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