

Artificial Intelligence and Public Administration: Governing the Fourth Industrial Revolution

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has moved from being a niche technological curiosity to a central concern of statecraft. Governments across the world are being compelled to answer a difficult question: how does a democratic administrative system regulate a technology that evolves faster than the law-making process itself? For a student of Public Administration, AI is not merely a technical subject — it is a live case study in regulatory design, bureaucratic capacity, federalism, international relations, and the changing nature of the state's role vis-à-vis citizens and markets.

India's hosting of the India AI Impact Summit in February 2026 — following the Bletchley Park (UK, 2023), Seoul (2024), and Paris (2025) summits — placed these questions at the centre of global policy discourse, with India positioning itself as a bridge between the technologically advanced North and the aspirations of the Global South.

AI and the Changing Nature of Public Administration

1. **From rule-based to algorithmic governance:** Traditional public administration relies on codified rules, discretion, and hierarchical accountability. AI-driven systems — used in welfare targeting, tax scrutiny, policing, and service delivery — introduce algorithmic decision-making, raising concerns about transparency, explainability, and administrative accountability.
2. **E-governance and service delivery:** AI is being used to strengthen last-mile delivery — chatbots for grievance redressal, predictive analytics for disaster management, AI-assisted diagnostics in public health, and automated document verification. This aligns with the administrative goals of minimum government, maximum governance.
3. **Capacity building within bureaucracy:** Effective AI governance requires civil servants who understand data systems, not just legal procedure. This calls for reform in training academies (LBSNAA, ATIs) to integrate technology literacy into administrative training.
4. **Federal and regulatory challenges:** Since data, IT, and telecom largely fall under the Union List, but implementation of welfare and policing happens at the state and local level, AI governance in India necessarily requires Centre-State coordination — a recurring theme in Indian federalism.

Key Administrative and Policy Concerns

- **Regulation without stifling innovation:** The challenge before public administrators is to design light-touch, principle-based regulation (as opposed to rigid, prescriptive rules) so that innovation is not throttled while harms — bias, misinformation, surveillance overreach — are checked.
- **Data protection and privacy:** The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 and its evolving rules form the backbone of India's approach, echoing the constitutional right to

privacy recognised in *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017).

- **Bias and discrimination:** Algorithmic systems can inherit and amplify social biases present in training data, posing a challenge to the administrative commitment to equality before law (Article 14).
- **Employment and skilling:** Automation-driven job displacement requires proactive administrative response through reskilling missions, social security portability, and labour law reform.
- **National security and misuse:** Deepfakes, disinformation, and AI-enabled cyber threats test the capacity of law enforcement and electoral machinery (a concern relevant to the Election Commission's institutional preparedness).

India and the Global South: A Question of Digital Sovereignty

A distinctive feature of the current global debate is the emerging fault line between AI powers with vast compute and capital (broadly the U.S. and China) and the rest of the world, especially the Global South, which risks being reduced to a consumer of AI technology rather than a co-creator of it. Administrators and policymakers in developing countries face a structural dilemma: dependency on foreign AI infrastructure versus building indigenous capability at a time when compute, capital, and semiconductor supply chains remain concentrated elsewhere.

India's stated approach — sanctioning a national AI mission, promoting Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) as a model of inclusive digitisation, and pushing for foundational models trained on Indian languages and data — is presented as a template for other developing nations to pursue "technological sovereignty" without isolating themselves from global innovation networks.

This also has a diplomatic dimension: India has attempted to position itself as a "middle power" and bridge-builder — championing multilateral, rules-based AI governance (through forums like the UN and G20) rather than leaving standards to be set unilaterally by a handful of dominant tech economies.

Way Forward: An Administrative Perspective

1. **Institutional mechanisms:** Establishing a dedicated regulatory body or empowering an existing one (on the lines of TRAI/SEBI) with the technical expertise to oversee AI deployment in critical sectors.
2. **Ethical and legal frameworks:** Operationalising principles of accountability, transparency, non-discrimination, and human oversight into enforceable administrative guidelines, not just voluntary codes.
3. **Capacity building:** Integrating AI and data governance training into recruitment and mid-career training of civil servants (UPSC-recruited services, State PSCs).
4. **Citizen-centric safeguards:** Building grievance redressal mechanisms specifically for AI-related harms, in line with the spirit of the Right to Information and principles of natural justice.
5. **International cooperation:** Using platforms like the UN AI Dialogue and G20 to push for

equitable access to compute and data resources for the Global South, ensuring governance frameworks are not designed solely by and for the most advanced economies.

Conclusion

AI governance sits precisely at the intersection of technology, ethics, law, and administration — making it a subject of growing relevance for the discipline of Public Administration. The task before administrators today is not to resist technological change but to build institutions resilient and agile enough to harness AI for public good while safeguarding constitutional values of equality, privacy, and accountability. India's attempt to speak both as a technology adopter and as a voice for the Global South illustrates how administrative statecraft is increasingly conducted on a global stage, not merely within domestic borders.

Note: This article draws general thematic inspiration from recent news coverage of the India AI Impact Summit (February 2026) but has been independently written for academic/examination reference use.