Digital Horizons and Dignity: A Critical Analysis of Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights in Belize

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Abstract

The Government of Belize embarked on an ambitious digital transformation to leverage artificial intelligence (AI) to boost the economy. The primary focus is to improve the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector and kickstart a high-value "Orange Economy." Well-known human rights challenges, however, are at the heart of the country's governance, problems with the rule of law, accountability and oversight to be specific. This paper examines the intersection of old and new and argues that unless the Belizean government introduces a firm, human rights-based management framework, the uncritical application of AI could exacerbate the problems they already have. The results of such an unchecked use of AI could be devastating, with increased surveillance, entrenched social inequality, job losses and erosion of digital sovereignty. Technological determinism is rejected, and a critical theoretical framework is adopted that is grounded in the social construction of technology and the primacy of international human rights law over vague ethical principles. It analyses the effects on privacy, discrimination, freedom of expression, and workers' rights, and concludes that a rights-based approach is not a barrier to progress, but a necessary prerequisite for fair and sustainable growth. Finally, concrete guidelines are provided for the Belizean government, the private sector and international partners to develop a governance framework that will ensure Belize's digital future is a future of dignity and opportunity for all its citizens.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Belize, Digital Rights, AI Governance, Data Colonialism

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Introduction

To reposition the country within the global digital economy, the government of Belize has embarked on a comprehensive campaign that is based on economic vulnerabilities and opportunities assessments, and envisions a future where the primary engine for growth and diversification is technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI). This vision is based on a multifaceted policy architecture that is comprised of national strategies, targeted investments, and educational reforms. However, a critical analysis reveals that these initiatives are overwhelmingly centred on economic imperatives and that considerations for human rights, rather than being foundational design principles, function as secondary or parallel concerns. This framing creates a critical tension for Belizean society — a conflict between the promise of economic growth through AI and the risk of a future defined by increased surveillance, discrimination, and job losses.

Considering the rapid technological advancements in Belize, it's hard not to see the collision of this digital push with a national context that has long been plagued by well-documented and persistent human rights problems (*Coc v. The Attorney General of Belize*, 2015; Human Rights Commission of Belize, 2021; U.S. Department of State, 2023, 2024; World Justice Project, 2023). The deep-rooted governance issues, lack of accountability and protection for the most vulnerable all form the landscape on which new AI systems will be deployed, and the uncritical adoption of AI would only make these existing problems even worse, through increased surveillance and entrenched inequality. Rejecting technological determinism (Smith & Marx, 1994; Tacheva et al., 2025), this paper adopts a theoretical framework grounded in the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) (Amrollahi & Abedin, 2024; Pinch & Bijker, 1984) and Critical Theory of Technology (Feenberg, 1991, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 2020) to argue that these emerging systems are not neutral tools but sites of political contestation. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative analysis that juxtaposes Belize's digital policy documents against its binding international human rights obligations to assess potential impacts on privacy, non-discrimination, and labour rights (United Nations, 2011). At the heart of the argument is that the allure of technological progress shouldn't lead us to forget the State's primary and non-negotiable obligation to protect the fundamental rights of its citizens. Without a fundamental reorientation of its strategy to place human rights at the core of its digital agenda, Belize's pursuit of a technologically advanced future risks deepening social divides, eroding democratic integrity, and creating a digital landscape where dignity is sacrificed for efficiency (Eubanks, 2018; Feenberg, 1991, 2002; O'Neil, 2016; United Nations, 2011).

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

The Belizean Context: Digital Aspirations and Human Rights Realities

Charting the Digital Future: Policy, Ambition, and the Orange Economy

Looking at the future of Belize's digital landscape, the Global Digital Services Investment Policy and Strategy is at the forefront of the country's transformation. Initiated by the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Investment (Government of Belize Press Office, 2025; Outsource Accelerator, 2025) and funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), this landmark initiative will catapult Belize's established Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector from its current state to a high-value, globally competitive digital services hub (Government of Belize Press Office, 2025). The strategy explicitly identifies advancements in artificial intelligence as the key to this evolution, aiming to move the BPO industry "up the value chain" away from traditional call centre operations and towards more sophisticated services, including data analytics, AI-driven customer relationship management, and specialised software development (Outsource Accelerator, 2025). The policy's focus is unmistakably economic, creating an "enabling environment" for the growth of global digital services, attracting foreign direct investments, and generating high-value employment opportunities (Government of Belize Press Office, 2025; Outsource Accelerator, 2025).

Complementing this is the Belize National Digital Agenda 2022-2025, an essential component of the country's vision for state modernisation (E-Governance and Digitalization Unit, 2022). The agenda's key pillars are investments in digital infrastructure, the creation of centralised digital platforms and the systematic adoption of innovative technologies across the public sector. Objectives of this agenda include bridging the urban-rural divide by expanding internet connectivity, developing a suite of e-Services for

citizens and businesses, and creating a national digital identity system to simplify access to government procedures. The aim is to create open, inclusive, and transparent institutions that will make the digital government a tool for building public trust (E-Governance and Digitalization Unit, 2022).

When considering the digital agenda in Belize, a key strategic element is the focus on the Orange Economy, which is comprised of creative and tech-driven sectors, such as animation, software development, digital art, gaming and social media entertainment that are identified as having immense growth potential (Government of Belize Press Office, 2025; Outsource Accelerator, 2025). The government is also using various education programs to build the necessary human capital, like the ConnectEd program and the U-Spaces initiative, which provides computer-equipped facilities in rural districts (Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, n.d.-a; Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, n.d.-b). The government's commitment is signalled by the Cabinet's approval for Belize to sign the Santiago Declaration, a regional initiative to promote AI systems that put human rights at the forefront (UNESCO, 2022). However, economic incentives function as the main drivers of the digital agenda, while human rights and ethical considerations are relegated to supplementary commitments. This separation creates a potential fault line where economic expediency may be prioritised over protecting fundamental rights.

The Human Rights Baseline: A Landscape of Pre-existing Vulnerabilities

The optimistic digital ambitions of Belize are in stark contrast to its burden of persistent, foundational human rights challenges that predate digital concerns, including issues of indigenous land rights and the rule of law (Coc v. The Attorney General of Belize, 2015; Human Rights Commission of Belize, 2021; U.S. Department of State, 2023, 2024; World Justice Project, 2023). The adoption of powerful data-driven technologies into the existing environment threatens to amplify these risks—specifically state impunity (U.S. Department of State, 2023, 2024), systemic discrimination (Human Rights Commission of Belize, 2021; U.S. Department of State, 2024), and institutional corruption (World Justice Project, 2023) —making these systemic violations more efficient and scalable.

A foundational weakness is the deficit in state accountability, specifically the performance of the country's security forces. There are credible reports of arbitrary or unlawful killings, and "inhuman and degrading treatment by security officers" (U.S. Department of State, 2023, 2024), and the successful prosecutions of officials are rare, which fosters a climate of impunity that corrodes the rule of law (Freedom House, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2024; World Justice Project, 2023). This situation is compounded by severe delays in the justice system, where pretrial detention can take an average of three to four years for murder accusations, which effectively undermines the constitutional right to a fair trial within a reasonable time (Freedom House, 2024; World Prison Brief, 2024).

When we look beyond the State in Belize, we can see that the country has deeply ingrained patterns of systemic discrimination. The pervasiveness of gender-based violence is described as an "endemic problem," and the public's perception is that official responses are insufficient (Belize Crime Observatory, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2024). Women in Belize also face severe economic injustices, evident in the persistent pay gap and the woefully low number of women in leadership positions (Human Rights Commission of Belize, 2021; U.S. Department of State, 2024). Spanish-speaking immigrants from Central America report serious, and all too often, ill-treatment from the police (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Indigenous people, such as the Maya, have been fighting for their rights to their traditional lands and resources, a struggle they've been waging for years that is intrinsically linked to their cultural survival (Coc v. The Attorney General of Belize, 2015). Workers' rights too have not been respected. There are numerous credible accusations of antiunion discrimination and harassment, especially in the agricultural sector (U.S. Department of State, 2024). As a whole, these issues paint a portrait of a society where legal protections are unevenly applied, leaving marginalised groups exposed to structural abuse.

It is within this context of inequality that the deployment of AI systems presents a unique danger. These well-known economic and social fissures in Belize cannot wait for future "reform" before technology is introduced; rather, the immediate risk is the "algorithmic amping up" of existing problems. As researchers O'Neil (2016) and Eubanks (2018) warn, when AI models are trained on data from a society plagued by discrimination, they inevitably reproduce those biases. The critical danger is that these new digital systems can entrench inequality, such as rejecting qualified women for jobs (Dastin, 2018) or denying services to specific ethnic groups (Noble, 2018)-while masquerading as completely objective and mathematical decisions (Benjamin, 2019), making the discrimination harder to detect and challenge (Pasquale, 2015).

These challenges are underpinned by the pervasive problem of government corruption and a lack of transparency. The government does not effectively implement its anti-corruption laws, and officials "often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity," particularly within the Department of Lands and Immigration services (Freedom House, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2024). This impunity is reinforced by an under-resourced Integrity Commission and a judicial system where successful prosecutions of high-level officials are virtually non-existent (Freedom House, 2024). Also, public trust in institutions is critically low; statistics show that a staggering 78% of Belizeans think that high-ranking officials would not face justice for embezzlement of public funds, and fewer than half the population retains confidence in the Judiciary (World Justice Project, 2023). This deficit in public integrity poses a severe threat as the nation moves toward digital transformation, as weak institutions are ill-equipped to manage the profound power of algorithmic tools. This context is critically relevant because there is a substantial risk of corrupt practices when large-scale AI systems and vast new datasets are involved. In order to prevent this, there is a need for robust, independent oversight and control of the systems.

Table 1 summarises this central tension, juxtaposing the government's key digital policy goals with the specific human rights risks they create or exacerbate in the Belizean context.

Table 1. Juxtaposition of Belizean Digital Policy Goals and Associated Human Rights Risks

Policy Goal (Source)	**Associated Human Rights Risk (Source)**
Develop a national digital identity system to simplify access to government services (E-Governance and Digitalization Unit, 2022, p. 53).	Risk of increased state surveillance, exclusion of marginalised groups without documentation, and misuse of data by security forces with a history of impunity (Magnone et al., 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2024).
Transform the BPO sector to higher-tier, data-intensive digital services (Government of Belize Press Office, 2025, para. 2).	Risk of invasive AI-enabled workplace monitoring infringing on worker privacy; risk of job displacement due to automation for a low-skilled workforce (United Nations, 2011; UNDP, 2024).
Utilise e-services to enhance government efficiency and create open, inclusive, and transparent institutions (E-Governance and Digitalization Unit, 2022, p. 55).	Risk of deploying biased algorithms that codify and scale existing discrimination against women, migrants, and ethnic minorities in public service delivery (Eubanks, 2018; U.S. Department of State, 2024).
Expand internet connectivity to remote and rural areas (E-Governance and Digitalization Unit, 2022, p. 39).	Risk of exacerbating the digital divide in terms of skills and literacy, not just access, leaving vulnerable populations unable to navigate the digital environment safely (UNDP, 2024).
Leverage foreign expertise and attract foreign direct investment for digital growth (Government of Belize Press Office, 2025, para 3).	Risk of “data colonialism” and “vendor lock-in”:, where critical data infrastructure is controlled by external entities with limited accountability to the local population, undermining digital sovereignty (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; ICT Pulse, 2025).

The Legal Framework Under Pressure

With respect to the protection of human rights, Belize has a clear and well-articulated legal framework, grounded in its Constitution and international treaties. The Constitution of Belize Part II (2021) specifically enshrines the fundamental rights and freedoms that are at the heart of human dignity, namely, the right to life, liberty, security, personal privacy (Section 14), and freedom of expression (Section 12). The legal system in Belize is, however, not limited to its Constitution. It is reinforced by adherence to international treaties like the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and others (United Nations, 1965, 1966, 1979; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], n.d.). To establish a direct linkage between international standards and local law, courts are instructed by the Interpretation Act of Belize to

interpret the Constitution in a manner consistent with these international commitments (Coc v. The Attorney General of Belize, 2015). This judicial mandate is invaluable because it ensures that Belize's constitutional protections remain dynamic. This allows the Judiciary to apply evolving international standards, such as digital privacy rights, to domestic cases even before specific local legislation is enacted.

Concerning giving effect to the laws that are in place in Belize, the institutional structures are fragmented and under-resourced and the country does not have a single, overarching national human rights institution (NHRI) (World Justice Project, 2022; U.S. Department of State, 2024) compliant with the Paris Principles, the international standard for independence and effectiveness (United Nations General Assembly, 1993), a deficit noted by local monitors (Human Rights Commission of Belize, 2021). Instead, small specialised bodies, like the Office of the Ombudsman, are overwhelmed, with complaint backlogs regarding the police department and matters before the courts (Office of the Ombudsman, Belize, 2023). The major issue, though, is the massive "implementation gap" between legal guarantees of these laws and their enforcement. These systemic backlogs hamper the justice system, leaving the public with little faith in court officials (U.S. Department of State, 2024; World Justice Project, 2023). This reality has dire implications for AI governance, as the already beleaguered system is profoundly ill-equipped to handle the novel technical and evidentiary challenges of attributing specific harms to the decisions of opaque and complex AI systems.

The Regional Dimension: Caribbean SIDS and Digital Sovereignty

The challenges Belize faces in adopting AI are inextricably linked to its status as a mainland Caribbean nation of the Small Island Developing State (SIDS) grouping. Structural weaknesses faced by SIDS, such as limited resources, small domestic markets, vulnerability to external events like climate change and economic dependency, are magnified when placed against the backdrop of a global AI race dominated by superpowers (specifically the U.S. and China) and tech giants controlling critical infrastructure (Maslej et al., 2024; UNCTAD, 2021).

According to a UNESCO survey in 2024, the disparities in AI and data readiness among SIDS are clear-cut, with many lagging due to limited resources - specifically a critical lack of quality training data and absent government strategies (UNESCO, 2024a). Of the SIDS, 71.2% lack quality data required for AI development, and 50% have no official initiatives for the use of AI (UNESCO, 2024a). These issues are compounded by infrastructural deficits and affordability challenges, creating a persistent digital divide (ITU, 2023; Magnone et al., 2024). In Belize, this divide is evident in rural districts where high-speed internet is often unavailable or expensive, forcing residents to rely on government-funded 'U-Spaces' for basic computer access rather than owning personal devices (E-Governance and Digitalization Unit, 2022; Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, n.d.-b).

When it comes to the Caribbean region, one of the most concerning shared vulnerabilities is its reliance on external actors for technology, a dynamic which has been described by scholars Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias as "data colonialism" (Couldry & Mejias, 2019). This is a new form of colonialism that operates not through the appropriation of land or resources, but through the extraction and appropriation of human life, in the form of data. As Caribbean nations become consumers rather than producers of AI, they jeopardise control over their own data, potentially exposing Belizean citizens' sensitive financial and biometric records to exploitation by foreign entities without any local legal recourse. Foreign tech giants, which have little accountability to our local communities, expropriate and process that data, and this can lead to vendor lock-in, where nations become dependent on foreign AI systems that may not align with local priorities or values. This reinforces economic dependency and erodes cultural identity. For Belize, economic dependency is reinforced by tethering the nation's digital infrastructure to costly foreign platforms, and cultural identity is eroded, as dominant AI models trained in the Global North often fail to recognise Belizean Kriol or Garifuna, effectively enforcing a digital assimilation that marginalises local heritage (ICT Pulse, 2025).

The antidote is to pursue digital sovereignty when faced with the threat of digital colonialism. The capacity of a state or region to control its digital destiny cannot be achieved by individual nations acting alone but instead requires a coordinated, regional approach focused on building local capacity through investment in STEM education and regional research hubs (ICT Pulse, 2025). Regional bodies such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Caribbean Telecommunications Union (CTU) can play an important part in this process by creating a harmonised regional AI regulatory framework and merging resources so they can bargain collectively with the Big Tech platforms, as suggested in the UNESCO Caribbean AI Policy Roadmap (UNESCO, 2024). For Belize, this regional alignment is existential: with a small population and

limited market leverage, Belize cannot effectively regulate global tech giants alone. Only by anchoring its digital strategy within this broader Caribbean bloc can Belize secure the bargaining power needed to demand AI systems that respect its specific legal standards and cultural diversity.

Development of the Conceptual Framework

To move beyond a simple inventory of risks, a deeper theoretical framework is required. This paper rejects the simplistic notion of technology as a neutral tool and instead adopts a critical perspective, drawing from the sociology of technology and international human rights law to argue that technology is a site of political contestation where rights are either upheld or violated (Amrollahi & Abedin, 2024; Feenberg, 2017; Pinch & Bijker, 1984).

Beyond Neutral Tools: A Critical Theory of Technology

A common assumption when discussing AI is technological determinism or the notion that technology is the driving force behind social change and that societies must adapt to its dictates (Smith & Marx, 1994). This report does not subscribe to that view and employs the framework of the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), where the dynamics of technology are influenced by the social forces on which they rely, and not the other way round (Amrollahi & Abedin, 2024; Pinch & Bijker, 1984; Klein & Kleinman, 2002; Van Baalen et al., 2016). The development of any technology is a social process involving negotiation among "relevant social groups" and is characterised by *interpretive flexibility*, where artefacts are culturally constructed and interpreted in different ways (Pinch & Bijker, 1984).

When the government of Belize decided to focus its AI strategy on the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector, it wasn't a foregone conclusion. It was a deliberate social, political and economic decision that reflects the priorities of dominant actors - government and their international financial partners - such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the World Bank - who see digital services as the engine that will drive the country's growth. Drawing from a Critical Theory of Technology, which has its roots in the Frankfurt School and has been championed by thinkers like Andrew Feenberg, we gain a framework that reveals these technological decisions as inherently political rather than merely technical (Feenberg, 1991, 2002). According to this perspective, technology isn't a neutral thing, but a powerful medium of control that embodies specific cultural and ideological values that shape our way of life (Delanty & Harris, 2021; Feenberg, 1991). Feenberg argues that the design of technology contains *technical codes*—the values and biases of the dominant culture that are inscribed into the technology itself (De Jong & Prey, 2022; Feenberg, 1991). For example, a system designed for maximum efficiency may have a technical code that devalues worker autonomy or environmental protection. This is a form of *substantive bias*, where the very architecture of the system reflects and reinforces a particular ideology.

Evaluating the drive towards AI in Belize through this critical lens, it is clear that the country is codifying a specific hierarchy of values - prioritising economic efficiency, global competitiveness and market-driven innovation - into its digital infrastructure. The introduction of a national digital ID, for instance, is not just a modernisation of systems, but a potential expansion of state power and surveillance, a scenario that's already being seen in other Caribbean nations (Access Now, 2022; Magnone et al., 2024). This critical lens reveals that AI is a very much a political process, and any new systems that arise could be optimised for the goals of a dominant coalition at the expense of other vital societal values, such as protecting the low-skilled workforce, ensuring equitable access for rural communities, and prioritising data sovereignty.

International Human Rights Law as a Normative Anchor

We often hear the terms "AI ethics," "responsible AI," and "trustworthy AI." While well-intentioned, these concepts often lack the precision, universality, and enforceability to be really effective in protecting people when discussing the governance of AI. In response to these limitations, this paper contends that international human rights law must be placed at the heart of AI governance, acting as its essential normative anchor.

Many corporate and governmental AI governance initiatives that are branded under ethics fail to mention human rights or treat them as just one value among many (Jobin et al., 2019). This is insufficient since ethics are often subjective, culturally relative, and voluntary, whereas human rights are grounded in

international law, considered universal, inalienable, and have very clear, legally binding instructions for states to respect, protect and bring to life the rights of their citizens. The concept of a state's duty to protect against abuses by third parties, such as private tech companies, is a principle that is firmly established in international law (United Nations, 2011), and that is not found within the loose concept of ethics. The human rights framework also comes with an existing ecosystem of institutions—courts, treaty bodies, and civil society organisations—for monitoring compliance and seeking remedy (OHCHR, n.d.).

There is a significant risk that the language of ethics could function as "ethics washing," which is a rhetorical exercise that creates a facade of moral guidelines that avoid the hard work of creating binding regulations and robust enforcement mechanisms. A widely recognised strategy for combating this is the human rights-based approach (HRBA). This approach is firmly grounded in the legally binding framework of human rights and integrates the principles, standards, and norms of international human rights law into the plans, policies and processes of development. An HRBA emphasises participation, accountability, non-discrimination, transparency, and empowerment, and it can be applied through frameworks like the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). UNGPs rest on three pillars: the state duty to protect, the corporate responsibility to respect, and access to an effective remedy (United Nations, 2011). Private actors are required to conduct ongoing human rights due diligence, and governments are required to establish effective legislation and oversight, such as requiring mandatory Human Rights Impact Assessments (HRIAs) for high-risk AI systems (Brandusescu, 2021). For artificial intelligence, the right to an effective remedy is no less than paramount, as the damages caused by AI are often complex and difficult to trace. Consider a qualified person rejected for a bank loan or a job by a "black box" algorithm (O'Neil, 2016). If they are told only that the system flagged them as high-risk, they lack the evidence needed to ever challenge that decision in court. This poses a severe challenge to a judicial system like Belize's, which is struggling with delays and a lack of public trust (Senior Courts of Belize, 2025a; U.S. Department of State, 2025; World Justice Project, 2022).

This challenge is not theoretical; it is unfolding in Belize. While the executive branch's National Digital Agenda prioritises economic efficiency and digital modernisation—often reflecting the technical codes of international funders—the Judiciary has recognised the threat to due process. In August 2025, the Senior Courts of Belize issued Practice Direction No. 18, mandating strict human oversight and transparency for the use of AI in legal proceedings (Senior Courts of Belize, 2025b). This issuance marks a rare instance of a developing state attempting to impose binding regulatory standards rather than relying on voluntary corporate ethics. However, without broader legislative action to enforce similar standards on the private sector (such as mandatory HRIAs), these judicial measures remain a limited safeguard - protecting the courtroom, but leaving the wider society exposed to algorithmic harms.

To translate this framework from theory to practice, Table 2 demonstrates how key human rights, already enshrined in Belizean and international law, can be operationalised to address the specific challenges posed by AI systems.

Table 2. Operationalising Human Rights for AI Governance in Belize

Right	**Legal Source (Belize Constitution & International Treaties)**	**Application to Artificial Intelligence**
Right to Privacy	Constitution of Belize, Pt. II, Sec. 3(c), 9; ICCPR, Art. 17	Protection against the unlawful collection, processing, and sharing of personal data by AI systems. Regulation of surveillance technologies (e.g., facial recognition) and AI-enabled workplace monitoring. Ensuring data protection by design and by default (Constitution of Belize, 2021; United Nations, 1966).
Right to Non-Discrimination and Equality	Constitution of Belize, Pt. II, Sec. 3, 16; CERD, Art. 5; CEDAW	Prohibition of algorithmic bias that leads to discriminatory outcomes in employment, credit, housing, social benefits, or the justice system. Requirement for auditing AI systems for biased impacts on the basis of race, sex, origin, or other protected

		grounds (Constitution of Belize, 2021; United Nations, 1965, 1979).
Right to Freedom of Expression	Constitution of Belize, Pt. II, Sec. 3(b), 12; ICCPR, Art. 19	Ensuring that AI-driven content moderation on digital platforms does not arbitrarily censor legitimate speech or political dissent. Combating AI-generated disinformation and hate speech while upholding principles of necessity and proportionality (Constitution of Belize, 2021; United Nations, 1966).
Right to a Fair Trial and Due Process	Constitution of Belize, Pt. II, Sec. 6; ICCPR, Art. 14	Guaranteeing human oversight, transparency, and the right to challenge decisions when AI is used in judicial or administrative proceedings (e.g., for risk assessments, evidence analysis, or sentencing recommendations) (Constitution of Belize, 2021; United Nations, 1966).
Right to an Effective Remedy	ICCPR, Art. 2(3)	Establishing accessible and effective mechanisms for individuals to seek redress when their rights are violated by an AI system. This includes ensuring that victims can identify who is responsible and obtain appropriate reparation (United Nations, 1966).
Right to Work and Rights at Work	Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 23; ILO Conventions, No. 102, 111, 122,142, 158	Protecting workers from job displacement due to automation without adequate social safety nets and retraining opportunities. Ensuring decent work conditions, including protection from unfair dismissal or discrimination by algorithmic management systems (United Nations, 1948; International Labour Organization, n.d.).

Discussion: Analysis of Key Intersections and Potential Impacts

Applying the established theoretical framework, this section analyses the domains where AI deployment in Belize is likely to have the most profound and multifaceted impact on human rights.

The Right to Privacy and the Spectre of Surveillance

Regarding privacy in Belize, the Constitution and the ICCPR (Constitution of Belize, 2021; United Nations, 1966) provide a strong foundation for the protection of personal data. However, the government's digital agenda will dramatically increase the collection of personal information in a country that has no modern data protection framework and is plagued by weak institutional oversight. The Belize strategy's twin pillars are modernising the public sector and transforming the BPO industry, both of which are essentially processes that can be described as "datafication." The plan to introduce e-Services and a national digital ID will centralise an enormous amount of sensitive citizen data, which includes health, financial records, and biometric data, into government-controlled databases (E-Governance and Digitalization Unit, 2022). Simultaneously, private companies will be handling more sensitive data as the BPO sector in Belize transitions to higher-tier services (Government of Belize Press Office, 2025). This is occurring in a regulatory vacuum, as Belize lacks a comprehensive data protection law that aligns with international standards, such as the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), leaving citizens' data vulnerable (Data Sentinel, n.d.).

Belize faces the powerful temptation of mass surveillance when collecting and centralising data. The documented history of abuse and impunity within the country's security forces (U.S. Department of State, 2024) is a cause for concern, and the use of AI-enabled technologies, such as public facial recognition systems, social media monitoring, and predictive policing algorithms, compounds this concern. If left unchecked, this would be enough to decimate privacy and stifle freedom of expression and association (Amnesty International & Access Now, 2020; Zuboff, 2019). This threat is not limited to the State, though,

in the BPO sector, the drive for efficiency could lead to inhumane, AI-enabled monitoring at the workplace. As evidenced by the global rise of 'bossware', documented by the Electronic Frontier Foundation (Cyphers & Gebhart, 2020), and in the strict algorithmic control used by giants like Amazon and Teleperformance (Kantor et al., 2021). These technologies for algorithmic management, like keystroke tracking and sentiment analysis, become weapons of monitoring, analysis, and discipline that track employees' communications, movements away from the office and even their emotional states, creating a climate of constant scrutiny that infringes on worker privacy, dignity, and autonomy (United Nations, 2011).

The Algorithmic Reinforcement of Inequality

One of the most insidious aspects of AI is its capacity to absorb, replicate, and amplify existing societal biases and entrench discrimination under the appearance of technical objectivity (Eubanks, 2018; Noble, 2018). Often referred to as the *bias in, bias out* problem, this is based on the idea that if the data used to train an AI system reflects historical patterns of inequality, the algorithm will, in turn, inevitably produce biased and discriminatory outcomes (O'Neil, 2016).

In Belize, this risk manifests across several key fault lines, often in an intersectional manner:

- Gender Discrimination: In the BPO sector, which is a major employer of women, if AI systems used in the process of hiring, promotion, and performance evaluation are fed with historical data, they may very likely perpetuate the gender pay gap and the "glass ceiling" that limits women's access to management roles (U.S. Department of State, 2024). AI-driven credit scoring could also penalise women for historical economic disadvantages, limiting their access to capital.
- Ethnic and Migrant Discrimination: As for indigenous peoples and Spanish-speaking immigrants, it's a well-known issue that they're the target of systemic discrimination (U.S. Department of State, 2024). A predictive policing system fed with biased arrest data could result in over-policing and disproportionate surveillance directed at these communities. A bank's algorithm for deciding who gets a loan could very well learn to associate specific neighbourhoods and last names with higher levels of credit risk, effectively cutting off these communities from any access to financial services.
- Linguistic and Cultural Bias: When training large language models and other AI systems, most of the time, the developers rely on data from the Global North, and the models are fine-tuned for standard English (ICT Pulse, 2025). This means that those systems are less effective for speakers of Belizean Kriol, Garifuna and Mayan languages, and by extension, these languages are being pushed to the periphery, leading to cultural erasure in the digital sphere and practical exclusion from digital services. This perpetuates the marginalisation of local cultures and identities, and can be seen as a form of digital colonialism (Couldry & Mejias, 2019).
- Intersectionality: These biases do not operate in isolation. For example, an indigenous woman from a rural area could face compounded discrimination simultaneously from an AI system that is biased on the basis of gender, ethnicity, language, and geographic location. Belize's digital transformation risks becoming a powerful new engine for reinforcing old injustices. To avoid this, there should be a clear-cut system of auditing and fact-checking for bias in the digital space, a guarantee that the data being fed into the systems is representative and, above all, transparent.

Freedom of Expression in the Digital Public Sphere

When it comes to the public sphere in Belize, the growing trend is towards a digital one, and artificial intelligence presents two serious problems for freedom of expression. These are flawed automated content moderation and AI-generated disinformation.

Major social media platforms are using AI for content moderation, but these systems don’t always have the cultural nuance to operate effectively in the Global South (Gillespie, 2018). As a result, these platforms face two distinct failures. The first is *over-removal*, where legitimate and lawful speech is censored, such as a politician’s commentary in the local Kriol language. The second is *under-removal*, where genuinely harmful content like hate speech and incitement to violence goes unchecked. This dynamic effectively outsources crucial decisions about the boundaries of acceptable speech in Belize to foreign corporations with little or no local accountability, thereby creating a "chilling effect" on public discourse (Kaye, 2019).

Taking into account the rapid growth of AI, its ability to generate highly realistic disinformation and "deepfakes" is a major concern. Generative AI's potential to manipulate public discourse and cause social divisions is now very real, and if applied in the Belizean political arena, could have a severe effect on democratic integrity (Chesney & Citron, 2019). In an environment where public trust in institutions is low, well-placed and precisely-targeted AI-driven disinformation campaigns could find and exploit existing divisions and destroy faith in elections (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019; World Justice Project, 2023). In addition, traditional fact-checking methods are overwhelmed by the pace at which AI can release false narratives to huge audiences, which causes reality to become distorted.

The Future of Labour and Economic Rights

When the government's AI strategy is viewed through a socio-economic lens, it is clear that its economic promise of economic uplift for the people of Belize is fundamentally and potentially catastrophic, at odds with the nation's human capital realities.

Well-known globally, the BPO sector is highly susceptible to being automated by AI (ICT Pulse, 2025), and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) forecasts that job losses in the region could be as high as 36 to 43 per cent by 2030 (Estevadeordal, 2018; UNDP, 2024). The government's optimistic plan that workers will just move up the value chain does not hold up in the face of a jarring reality: a massive proportion of Belizean workers only have a primary school education (UNDP, 2024), and this is not a small skill deficit. This fundamental lack of human capital makes the transition to high-skilled digital work a formidable challenge for the majority of workers.

Looking at the future of the BPO sector in Belize, the most likely outcome is the emergence of a two-tiered labour market. Those at the top, a small well-educated elite that possibly includes foreign workers, will fill the high-skilled jobs in the fields of data science and AI management, but the lower-skilled, large segment of the workforce faces the very real threat of technological unemployment. This consequence undermines the right to work, and in a country where economic rights are still in their early stages of development, it specifically exacerbates poverty and social inequality. The digital divide in Belize is fundamentally a divide in skills and opportunities, and current educational initiatives - such as short-term digital literacy training and coding camps - while commendable, are likely insufficient to address a challenge of this magnitude (Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, n.d.-b ; UNDP, 2024). Furthermore, the rise of the Orange Economy risks increasing precarious "gig work" managed by AI platforms. Lacking the support of social networks and the collective bargaining rights associated with traditional employment, this shift threatens to erode economic security and leave workers vulnerable.

Conclusion and Recommendations

When it comes to its ambitious digital agenda, Belize is at a crossroads. There is the potential for economic progress, but it is being pursued within a context of profound human rights vulnerabilities and institutional weaknesses. The agenda is facing a very real risk that its application of AI will amplify inequality, erode people's privacy, subvert democratic processes, and dispossess a large segment of its workforce. The analysis presented in this paper reveals that Belize's digital plans lack a cohesive vision to address these pressing issues. In order for Belize to secure a promising future, we need to go beyond ethereal promises of "ethical AI." The building blocks of this strategy are in the shape of robust and accountable institutions, well-defined and legally enforceable laws and regulations, and an endogenous sense of digital self-determination. The hypothesis is that the framework of a rights-based method would not be an impediment; actually, it is the only way we can be sure that technological progress will be for the betterment of all Belizeans and lead to sustainable and just growth.

Forging a Rights-Respecting AI Governance Framework

An effective AI governance framework for Belize must be tailored to its specific context and built on four essential pillars:

1. Rights-Based: The framework's foundation must be international human rights law, not vague or voluntary ethical principles. This gives us a clear, universally applicable, and legally binding standard for assessing and regulating the impact of technology on society (United Nations, 2011).

2. Multi-stakeholder and Participatory: Regarding AI development and oversight, government and corporate entities can't have a monopoly. Regular and meaningful contributions from civil society, academia, trade unions and, most importantly, the people who'll be most affected by AI systems are a must for generating public trust and identifying potential problems before they become major issues (Access Now, 2022).
3. Adaptive and Precautionary: As for adopting new technologies in Belize, the country should be a cautious "fast follower." Taking the time to observe what is working well elsewhere and adapting it to its own unique needs (World Bank, 2020). A precautionary approach means that where there are credible risks of severe or irreversible harm to human rights (e.g., in law enforcement or justice), the burden of proof should be on the proponents of technology to demonstrate its safety and necessity.
4. Transparent and Accountable: When it comes to accountability, the framework must have a clear mandate for transparency in the way AI systems are designed, trained and implemented. This includes requiring that all high-risk AI procurements must undergo Human Rights Impact Assessments (HRIAs) and that an independent oversight body is established. This body must possess the legal authority and technical capacity to audit systems, look into complaints, and give people access to fair redress (Brandusescu, 2021).

Concrete Policy Recommendations

For the Government of Belize:

1. Mandate Human Rights Due Diligence: Enact legislation that requires independent and public HRIAs before procurement or deployment of any AI system in high-risk public sector contexts, such as law enforcement, justice, social benefits, and border management.
2. Establish an Independent Oversight Body: Create a Digital and Human Rights Commission that is sufficiently resourced with legal and technical expertise, and grant it the statutory power to investigate complaints, conduct forensic audits of algorithms, issue binding recommendations, and levy fines.
3. Enact and Enforce a Modern Data Protection Act: Urgently pass a comprehensive data protection law aligned with the highest international standards and establish an independent Data Protection Commissioner with robust enforcement powers to ensure compliance by both public and private entities.
4. Launch a National Human Capital Investment Strategy: Address the critical human capital deficit through a massive, long-term investment in strengthening foundational education (literacy and numeracy), expanding vocational training for mid-level digital skills, and increasing access to higher education in STEM fields to build a domestic talent pipeline.
5. Champion Regional Cooperation: Actively work through CARICOM and the CTU to develop a harmonised Caribbean AI governance framework, a regional data strategy, and collective mechanisms for engaging with global technology companies to strengthen the region's digital sovereignty.

For the Private Sector (including BPO operators and tech investors):

1. Adopt and Implement the UNGPs: Proactively adopt the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as the core framework for all AI-related activities. This includes conducting ongoing human rights due diligence and establishing accessible grievance mechanisms.
2. Invest in the Local Workforce: Partner with Belizean educational institutions to co-design curricula and fund retraining and upskilling programs for workers at risk of displacement from automation. This is both a social responsibility and a long-term business imperative.

For International Partners (including the IDB, UN, and bilateral donors):

1. Condition Funding on Human Rights Safeguards: Make funding for digital transformation projects conditional on the recipient government conducting robust, independent HRIAs and establishing credible, independent oversight and accountability mechanisms. Support should not enable ethics washing.

2. Support Regional and Indigenous Capacity Building: Prioritise funding for regional initiatives that build collective digital sovereignty, such as shared data infrastructure, regional research hubs, and programs that support the development of AI solutions by and for the Caribbean region.

By embracing a governance model firmly anchored in human rights and pursuing these concrete actions, Belize and its partners can better navigate the profound challenges of the AI era. The goal must be to ensure that the pursuit of a digital future does not come at the cost of human dignity but rather serves as a means to enhance human dignity for all Belizeans.

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