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Artificial intelligence and data governance in Africa: Bridging regional integration and global influence

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The rapid emergence of artificial intelligence offers significant potential to address development challenges across Africa, from enhancing healthcare and agriculture to improving education. However, this sudden rise has simultaneously exposed profound gaps in existing governance frameworks. While many African countries have begun to develop data protection regimes and AI strategies, progress is uneven, and the fundamental interdependence of AI and data governance remains under-addressed. This paper provides a comprehensive empirical mapping of the AI and data governance landscapes across all African regions, analysing how these frameworks are evolving, the external influences shaping them, and the critical policy implications for the continent's digital future.

This paper contributes three key insights. First, it maps the continent's governance landscape, covering personal data protection laws, national data strategies, and AI strategies or policy frameworks. Second, it traces the complex web of external actors and forces, including the Brussels Effect and the extraterritorial reach of the EU's AI Act and GDPR, the US-China geopolitical competition and multilateral AI safety summits, and examines how they shape Africa's approach to data and AI governance. Third, it connects these findings to actionable policy implications, demonstrating that effective governance requires simultaneous attention to data infrastructure, institutional capacity, regional coordination, and ethical accountability.

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Acronyms

AAIGI	Africa AI Governance Index
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AfDB	African Development Bank
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AI/ML	Artificial Intelligence/Machine Learning
AJSD	African Journal of Sustainable Development
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
ANPDP	National Authority for the Protection of Personal Data
ANSICE	National Agency for Information Systems Security and Electronic Certification
APD	Data Protection Agency (Angola)
APDP	Data Protection Authority (Benin)
APDP	Authority for the Protection of Personal Data (Mali)
APDPVP	Authority for the Protection of Personal Data and Privacy
ARCAI	African Research Center for Artificial Intelligence
ARPTC	Regulatory Authority for Posts and Telecommunications of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
ARTCI	Regulatory Authority for Telecommunications/ICT of Côte d'Ivoire
AU	African Union
CDP	Commission for the Protection of Personal Data (Senegal)
CEMAC	Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States
CIL	Commission for Information Technology and Civil Liberties
CMIL	Malagasy Commission for Information Technology and Civil Liberties
CNPDP	National Commission for the Protection of Personal Data
CNDP	National Commission for Data Protection (Cabo Verde)
CNDP	National Commission for Data Protection (Djibouti)
CNDP	National Commission for the Control of Personal Data Protection (Morocco)
CNPD	National Commission for the Protection of Personal Data (Republic of Congo)
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CTN-IA	National AI Technical Committee
D4D	Digital for Development
DP	Data Protection
DPA	Data Protection Authority
DPC	Data Protection Commission
DPO	Data Protection Officer

DPO	Data Protection Office (Mauritius)
DTA	Digital Transformation with Africa
EAC	East African Community
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
EC	European Commission
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EU	European Union
FAIR	Fairness, Accountability, Inclusiveness and Integrity, and Responsibility (Mauritius)
FAccT	ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency
FSC	Financial Services Commission
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GIRAI	Global Index on Responsible AI
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GPT	Generative Pre-trained Transformer
GAID	General Application and Implementation Directive
HIPSSA	Support for Harmonisation of the ICT Policies in Sub-Saharan Africa
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
INPDP	National Authority for the Protection of Personal Data
IPDCP	Authority for the Protection of Personal Data
ISOC	Internet Society
LLM	Large Language Model
MACRA	Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority
ML	Machine Learning
MoCTI	Ministry of Communication, Technology and Innovation
NAIS	National Artificial Intelligence Strategy
NDP Act	Nigeria Data Protection Act
NDPC	Nigeria Data Protection Commission
NISSA	National Information Security and Safety Authority
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODPC	Office of the Data Protection Commissioner
PDPC	Personal Data Protection Centre
PDPL	Personal Data Protection Law
PDPO	Personal Data Protection Office
POPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act
POTRAZ	Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe
REC	Regional Economic Community
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
SADC	Southern African Development Community

SNDIA	National Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence
SNIA	National Artificial Intelligence Strategy
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
U.S.	United States
WAICO	World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation

Executive summary

The rapid emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) offers significant potential to address development challenges across Africa, from enhancing healthcare and agriculture to improving education. However, this sudden rise has simultaneously exposed profound gaps in existing governance frameworks. While many African countries have begun to develop data protection regimes and AI strategies, progress is uneven, and the fundamental interdependence of AI and data governance remains under-addressed. This paper provides a comprehensive empirical mapping of the AI and data governance landscapes across all African regions, analysing how these frameworks are evolving, the external influences shaping them, and the critical policy implications for the continent's digital future.

This paper contributes three key insights. First, it offers a robust empirical mapping of the continent's governance landscape: as of early 2026, 44 African countries have enacted data protection laws, while at least 20 have launched national AI strategies or policy frameworks. Second, it traces the complex web of external influences, including the extraterritorial impact of the EU's AI Act and GDPR, multilateral AI safety summits, and continental initiatives like the AU Continental AI Strategy, illustrating how African nations navigate competing governance models to assert digital sovereignty. Third, it connects these findings to actionable policy implications, demonstrating that effective governance requires simultaneous attention to data infrastructure, institutional capacity, regional coordination, and ethical accountability.

Implementation of data governance frameworks across the continent is notably uneven. While countries motivated by global trade integration have adopted comprehensive laws, others face limited regulatory capacity, leading to gaps in enforcement and interoperability. Furthermore, the independence of national data protection authorities is frequently constrained, as many remain embedded within executive agencies, limiting their ability to ensure compliance. Regional frameworks such as the African Union Data Policy Framework and the Malabo Convention provide a vital vision for integration, yet their domestication is slowed by limited ratification and operational hurdles. The analysis highlights that without functional, harmonised data protection regimes, attempts to govern AI applications risk "building on sand."

AI governance in Africa involves guiding the development and deployment of technologies to align with ethical principles and legal requirements. As AI systems become embedded in critical sectors, governance frameworks must address challenges that traditional data protection laws were not designed to tackle,

including algorithmic bias, transparency, accountability, and the concentration of computational power.

Our mapping reveals significant momentum in AI policy formulation across all five African regions. National strategies consistently converge around common pillars: infrastructure development, talent cultivation, ethical governance, and sectoral adoption. However, the risk of "governance theatre" arises, as ambitious national strategies aiming to transform nations into "global AI hubs" remain unimplemented due to limited computing resources, constrained technical expertise, and weak enforcement mechanisms. The paper emphasises that while the African Union's Continental AI Strategy provides a unifying framework, translation into concrete national legislation and operational capacity remains the central challenge.

The findings point toward several urgent policy imperatives for Africa's next stage of digital governance:

- **Prioritise Implementation over Strategy Proliferation:** Governments must shift focus from drafting new frameworks to strengthening the enforcement of existing data protection laws and building the institutional capacity of regulators.
- **Sequencing Governance:** Efforts must recognise the hierarchical relationship between data and AI governance. Consolidating data infrastructure and protections is a prerequisite for meaningful AI regulation.
- **Renewed Regional Integration:** Fragmentation across Regional Economic Communities undermines continental goals. Moving beyond model frameworks to active implementation and mutual recognition of standards is essential to enable cross-border data flows and increase collective bargaining power.
- **Strategic Engagement with External Partners:** Governance development must prioritise African agency, ensuring that partnerships focus on mutual benefit rather than one-way technical assistance or the imposition of external standards.
- **Embedding Accountability:** High-level strategies must be linked to measurable outcomes, with clear assignment of responsibilities, transparent monitoring, and adaptive mechanisms that allow for course corrections based on empirical results.

Africa's AI journey is moving from the phase of initial hype toward hard realities; however, the continent's governance challenges illuminate universal tensions between innovation, sovereignty, and accountability. Ultimately, the ability to transform AI from a foreign imposition into a locally harnessed tool for development depends on the sustained, resource-intensive work of translating

aspirational continental visions into functional, integrated national governance systems. Whether Africa participates in the global AI economy as an equal partner or remains relegated to a peripheral role as a data source depends entirely on the governance choices made in the coming years.

Introduction

Few technologies in recent years have offered as much promise as AI, but also as much risk. For Africa, the potential of AI in, for example, education, health and agriculture is considerable. But so too is the risk that it could widen existing inequalities through job loss, exploitation of data and labour in Africa, use of deep fakes and disinformation, and bias in algorithmic systems. In large part, whether AI works for or against African societies will depend on the governance of its use.

In many African countries, governance of AI and of data is lacking. Skills and infrastructure are also limited, making even basic use of AI difficult (Adams et al., 2025). Policymakers need to consider risks such as job loss, exploitation of labour and data in Africa, bias in algorithmic systems (which could reinforce rather than cut across existing inequalities), and loss of privacy in using data (Gwagwa et al., 2020; Akpudo et al., 2024). But they also need to consider the potential of AI to help address long-standing development challenges. This is no easy balance to strike. Governance of AI needs to reflect local values and context, rather than simply being transplanted from elsewhere. And it needs to reflect the priorities of African citizens, not necessarily those of technology providers from elsewhere.

Underlying all of this is a link between data governance and AI governance. Good data governance supports good AI systems. And in turn, as we use AI, our data governance needs to evolve. To judge the potential of the digital economy for African countries, we need to consider their approach to data governance and to AI governance, and more importantly, how they interact. Data governance refers to policies, practices and frameworks for the use, storage, sharing and protection of data (personal and non-personal) (Hill, 2016). This includes data protection laws (setting out rights and responsibilities in relation to personal data), data privacy (protection of personal information from misuse or unauthorised use) and issues of data sovereignty, ownership and flows. Often, in public discussion, data protection and data privacy are treated as the same thing. In reality, data protection is the wider legal and regulatory framework, while data privacy relates more directly to an individual's expectations of their personal information. Building on this, data governance also includes governance mechanisms, technical standards and policies for the data lifecycle (Marcucci, 2023).

In a similar vein, AI governance is about policies, practices and systems for using AI in line with societal values, the law and ethics (Maas, 2023). Such governance might, for example, consider transparency, accountability, safety, bias in algorithms, and the impact of automated decision-making (Papagiannidis, 2025). Supporting much of AI are data sets, which are used to train, validate, and run AI systems. In this sense, good data governance supports good AI governance. But

beyond data, AI governance raises issues of, for example, interpretability of models, accountability for algorithms, use of AI in different sectors, and the concentration of technical know-how and computing power. In that sense, data governance supports AI governance, but the latter raises new priorities and challenges for data governance.

In this paper, we consider the state of data and AI governance in Africa. Too often, we do not know enough about how governance is developing in a region that is both a source of data and a user of AI, but which has tended to be left out of global AI development. In recent years, much work in the literature has explored the evolving landscape of data and AI in Africa (Ndemo et al., 2023; Obia, 2025; Preko et al., 2025; Musoni, 2024; Salaam et al., 2025). At the same time, much existing work in the wider field of digital governance has looked at data governance and AI policy at the national level in high-income countries (Alanoca et al., 2025; Bernier et al., 2022; Arner et al., 2022). Much of this has focused on the U.S., the EU and China (Chun et al., 2024). Increasingly, we are seeing work that brings together national policy, regional attempts at harmonisation and geopolitical forces across the continent (Africa AI Governance Index (AAIGI), 2026; Global Index on Responsible AI (GIRAI) Report, 2026).

In this paper, we argue that in Africa, the moment for AI governance is also a moment for data governance. And they must be considered together. In the following sections, we set out why. In section two, we set out what data governance and AI governance mean, and set up the analytical approach supporting this paper. In section three, we consider the state of data protection and AI policy across the continent. Here we look at legislation at the national level, attempts at harmonisation at the regional level, and the forces supporting policy decisions. In section four, we consider the interplay between data and AI governance. In particular, we consider risks they may pose for African countries, as well as opportunities. In the final section of this note, we set out priorities for policymakers, regional institutions and our partners as they seek to develop locally appropriate, fit-for-purpose governance of data and AI in Africa.

1. Data Governance in Africa

There are three interrelated yet distinct concepts that underpin data governance discussion: data governance, data privacy, and data protection. Data governance encompasses the overarching framework through which data is managed, including the policies, institutional roles, and decision-making structures that guide how data is organised, valued, and safeguarded across its lifecycle (Abraham et al., 2019). Data privacy, by contrast, centres on the individual's right

to control how their personal information is collected, used, and shared, emphasising consent, autonomy, and limits on unauthorised access (Di Vimercati et al., 2012). Data protection refers to the technical and organisational measures designed to secure data against unauthorised access, loss, or misuse (Hill, 2016). Distinguishing these concepts is essential because African states often conflate them in law and practice, leading to fragmented or incomplete regulatory approaches. Understanding their differences illuminates why certain gaps persist and how they shape continental governance trajectories.

1.1 The governance of personal data

Over the past decade, Africa's engagement in the global digital economy has led to significant change in the protection of personal data on the continent, reflecting the continent's growing integration into the global digital economy. In that time, the continent has seen the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the emergence of the African Digital Single Market, and finally the entry into force of the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, also known as the Malabo Convention (AfCFTA Agreement, 2018; AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol; African Union, 2014). But in many ways, entry into force of the Convention marks only the beginning of the development of data governance across the continent. And at present, there is no fully developed system of data governance across Africa, as the architecture is still taking shape rather than operating as a mature, settled system.

Through its provisions on personal data, cybersecurity, cybercrime and electronic transactions, the Malabo Convention underlines principles of lawful personal data processing. It sets out rights of data subjects and requires each state party to set up a Data Protection Authority. But the Convention's wide scope has been questioned, and its slow rate of ratification has hampered prospects of a consistent approach to personal data protection across the continent. In some respects, its provisions are now seen as outdated and insufficient in light of the challenges of data and AI.

In 2018, the African Union Commission, with input from the Internet Society, produced the AU Commission, ISOC Personal Data Protection Guidelines for Africa (2018). These guidelines set out a way for member states to implement the Malabo Convention. Their existence underlines the need for more to be done between adoption of a treaty and compliance with it. In practice, the recommendations in the guidelines have been little used. Nor have they helped drive more ratification of the Convention or more consistency of national data protection frameworks. In part, this reflects the gap between tools for implementation and their use. And as a result, ratification of the Convention and

its implementation have remained limited. Its potential in practice has yet to be realised.

Box 1: Continental Frameworks

Framework	Adopting Body	Date Adopted	Binding Status	Scope	Status Note
AU Continental AI Strategy	African Union (Assembly)	2024 (37th AU Summit, Feb 2024)	Non-binding - strategic framework	Human-centric, development-focused AI vision; calls for an African Charter on Trustworthy AI	In effect; implementation ongoing across member states
Malabo Convention	African Union	2014	Binding treaty - only where domesticated	Cybersecurity and personal data protection	Ratified by 15 of 55 AU member states, signed by 12 more (as of source date)
AfCFTA Digital Trade Protocol	African Union/AfCFTA Secretariat	Adopted Feb 2024 (37th AU Summit)	Binding treaty once in force - requires State Party ratification threshold	Digital trade rules: data flows, e-commerce, consumer protection, cross-border data	Open for ratification; not yet in force as of source date
AfCFTA Annex on Emerging and Advanced Technologies	African Union/AfCFTA Secretariat	Adopted Feb 2025 (38th AU Summit) - 1 of 8 annexes adopted in that session	Binding once the Protocol is in force (annex is an integral part of it)	Emerging/advanced technologies including AI, in a digital-trade and cyber-defence context	Adopted by AU Assembly; tied to Protocol's ratification timeline
Africa AI Declaration	African Union + Smart Africa + governments of 54 African states	4 April 2025, Kigali	Non-binding - political declaration	Aligns AI vision with the Continental AI Strategy, Smart Africa's AI for Africa Blueprint, the AU Data Policy Framework, and the Malabo Convention	Adopted; pillar count varies across secondary sources - worth reconciling before external use (see the Assessment doc)
AU Data Policy Framework	African Union Commission	28 July 2022 (Decision EX/CL/Dec.1144 (XL))	Non-binding - policy framework	Common vision, principles and priorities for national data systems; foundation for an African Digital Single Market	In effect; AU validation of related follow-on data governance frameworks was underway as of Dec 2025
Smart Africa- AI for Africa Blueprint	Smart Africa Alliance (government -endorsed)	First edition, 2021	Non-binding - foundational blueprint	Guidance for member states developing national AI strategies; championed by South Africa	In effect; foundational reference for several national strategies listed in the AI Strategies sheet

In each of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) on the continent, policy frameworks for handling personal data have been developed. Taken together, these frameworks create a patchwork of sometimes conflicting governance across the continent. The table below summarises the key continental and regional frameworks:

Box 2: Regional Frameworks

Region	REC	Key Data Protection Framework	Status and Limitations
West Africa	ECOWAS	Supplementary Act on Personal Data Protection (2010)	Legally binding amongst member states; criticised for failing to define data subject rights to lodge complaints with regulators or to exercise data portability (Musoni et al., 2024)
East Africa	EAC	EAC Cyberlaw Legal Framework (2008); EAC Data Governance Policy Framework (under development)	The 2008 framework omitted key concepts such as data minimisation; a new Data Governance Policy Framework has been validated by stakeholders but is not yet formally adopted
Central Africa	ECCAS / CEMAC	ECCAS Model Law on Personal Data Protection; CEMAC Consumer Protection Directive (2013)	Model law developed with ITU and ECA support; adoption by individual member states remains inconsistent, with limited enforcement capacity
North Africa	AMU / CEN-SAD	No dedicated regional data protection framework	Neither the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) nor the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) has adopted a regional data protection instrument; individual states such as Morocco and Tunisia have enacted national laws largely influenced by European standards
Southern Africa	SADC / COMESA	SADC Model Law on Data Protection; COMESA Data Protection Regulations	Frameworks exist, but implementation is uneven; some member states lack national laws altogether

More than just institutional development, this shows that across the continent there is recognition of the importance of good data governance for digitalisation, trade, and economic competitiveness. In particular, as more African countries develop digital identity systems, fintech, e-commerce and digital services, they increasingly need to assure their citizens of the privacy of their personal data. This supports investment, relations between the state and its citizens, and use of digital services (Musoni et al., 2023).

By 2026, 44 of the 55 member states of the African Union had passed data protection laws, and 38 had set up data protection authorities (Oloyede and Buza, 2025). Taken together, this shows considerable progress, but one that will have implications for integration between the regions and with the world. Annex 1

provides an overview of the status of data protection legislation and the adoption of AI strategies across African countries.

Countries with trade interests, and in particular those wanting to engage with, for example, the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), tend to have more comprehensive laws. Such laws support stronger data flows across borders and better access to markets around the globe. States with limited regulatory capacity often struggle to implement their laws. As a result, citizens may face cyber risks, limited access to digital services, and limited participation in growing digital value chains. In some cases, governments use data protection tools to advance their own political agenda. They use them not just to protect privacy, but to increase control of civic space and surveillance (Roberts and Mare, 2025). Taken together, these different motivations provide the basis for a range of data protection laws across the continent. They broadly support the aspirations of the continent, but in practice they conflict.

Typically, across the continent, data protection laws set out rights for data subjects, principles for processing data and obligations for data controllers and processors. Most also include provision for the creation of Data Protection Authorities (DPAs), which would oversee compliance with the laws, provide guidance and impose sanctions. But not all laws include such provision. And in some countries the role of the DPA would sit within an existing regulatory body or might not exist at all.

Often, where there is a DPA, its independence is in question. In many countries, for example, it sits within an executive agency or lacks sufficient financial and operational resources to do its job (Abdulrauf and Dube, 2024). And in some cases, no DPA has been set up under laws that otherwise exist. That further undermines enforcement and consistency of laws across the continent (Okolo, 2024). Such limitations of the DPA go beyond administrative concerns. They affect the effectiveness of data protection laws in practice. They affect, for example, the ability of citizens to exercise their rights, and whether businesses can engage in enforceable, accountable compliance. In practice, therefore, even where laws exist, they may not protect people. And weak enforcement in one country could well work against attempts at harmonisation across the continent.

1.2 The governance of non-personal data

While much of the initial regulatory focus in Africa has centred on privacy and personal data protection, the continent is increasingly expanding its efforts to govern non-personal data. Recognising that broader data governance is essential for economic growth, digital trade, and innovation, the African Union introduced the AU Data Policy Framework. This strategic blueprint guides member

states in developing comprehensive national data strategies that look beyond personal privacy to operationalise a unified, continent-wide data ecosystem. Regional Economic Communities are actively mirroring this shift to promote cross-border data sharing and data-enabled entrepreneurship. For instance, the East African Community (EAC) has adopted its Regional Data Governance Policy, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has launched the SADC Digital Transformation Strategy.

Together, these frameworks demonstrate a concerted effort to harmonise technical standards, govern all types of data and build the foundational infrastructure required for Africa's broader digital integration.

2. AI Governance in Africa

The data governance landscape documented in the preceding section establishes the foundational infrastructure upon which AI governance must necessarily build. Yet, the relationship between these two governance domains extends beyond simple precedence to reveal fundamental questions about power, sovereignty, and development in an increasingly algorithmically mediated world. As AI systems become embedded in critical sectors across Africa, the adequacy of governance frameworks takes on heightened urgency (Isagah et al., 2020; Arakpogun et al., 2021). Data protection laws, however comprehensive, were designed primarily to regulate how organisations collect, process, and protect personal information; they were not conceived to address the distinctive challenges posed by algorithmic decision-making systems that can perpetuate historical biases at scale, automated processes that operate with limited transparency or human oversight, and AI applications that concentrate both economic value and political power in ways that reshape labour markets, civic participation, and social relations.

Examining AI governance in Africa matters not only for the continent's 1.5 billion residents but for global AI development trajectories more broadly. Africa represents a minor source of training data for global AI systems, and no country within the continent has yet passed a binding AI law. African participation in shaping technical standards, ethical frameworks, and governance institutions remains limited (Barrett et al., 2025; Ayana et al., 2025; Okolo, 2025), raising fundamental questions about whether governance frameworks emerging on the continent can ensure AI serves local development priorities or whether they will reproduce patterns of technological dependency. In response to these challenges, African governments are increasingly drafting AI strategies and policies, though progress varies significantly by region. As of July 2026, our

analysis finds that at least 22 countries have drafted and launched a national AI strategy or framework[1].

At the continental and regional levels, the AU Continental AI Strategy (2025–2030) serves as a five-year, five-pillar framework designed to transition Africa from a passive consumer of AI to an active innovator. It focuses on capacity building, sovereign digital infrastructure, ethical governance, sectoral integration, and intra-regional cooperation, though its success hinges on the difficult task of domesticating these broad goals into enforceable national legislation. Complementing this, the EAC Regional AI Strategy (2026–2031) represents a unified effort across eight partner states to build a competitive AI ecosystem, focusing on talent, regional research nodes, and localised AI models for agriculture and healthcare. Despite this strategic momentum, there is a pervasive lack of coordination and transparency, as many national strategies aspire to global leadership but fail to account for severe infrastructural and capacity deficiencies, highlighting the urgent need for robust compliance mechanisms over mere strategy proliferation.

National AI strategies and policy frameworks across the continent highlight regional leaders and emerging ecosystems. In East Africa, Kenya leads with a tripartite approach consisting of a comprehensive National AI Strategy (2025–2030), the Draft Kenya Artificial Intelligence and Other Emerging Technologies Policy, 2026, and the Artificial Intelligence Bill, 2026. This Bill closely mirrors the EU AI Act with a risk-based classification system, proposes an independent Office of the AI Commissioner, and establishes strict penalties for malicious AI use. Rwanda, Ethiopia, and early-adopter Mauritius also have active, formalised policies aimed at building regional knowledge economies. West Africa represents the continent's most active region on AI governance, including Nigeria's strategy that targets a $15 billion GDP boost by 2030, and Ghana's revamped 2025–2035 strategy focusing on a "One Million Coders" initiative and sovereign data assets. Senegal, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mauritania have all formally launched frameworks, with Togo, Sierra Leone, and Cabo Verde actively drafting their own. ECOWAS is building a Regional AI Governance Framework designed to standardise data regulations, establish collaborative technology safeguards, and build unified digital public infrastructure across its 15 member states.

[1] These countries include Algeria, Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Mauritania, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tunisia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

In North Africa, Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt have integrated AI deeply into their national digital transformation agendas. Egypt's newly updated 2025–2030 strategy notably targets the creation of 30,000 AI professionals and is backed by the Egyptian Charter for Responsible AI. The landscape in Southern Africa is rapidly evolving but remains fragmented. South Africa is currently redrafting its AI Policy after a 2026 recall due to hallucinated citations, while Lesotho, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe have all successfully launched strategies overseen by newly minted National AI Councils. Angola stands out in the region for introducing a draft AI law that boldly asserts extraterritorial jurisdiction over global tech companies. The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), a 21-member trading bloc, has initiated a series of structured national stakeholder consultations, starting with workshops in Kenya and Zambia, to align digital regulations and create a unified, cross-border AI market across Eastern and Southern Africa. Conversely, Central Africa is severely hindered by weak institutional capacity and political instability, with Cameroon as the sole exception, advancing a comprehensive 2040 roadmap that includes developing a sovereign, multilingual LLM known as "GPT Cameroon".

Ultimately, the strategic implications of these national AI strategies reveal a remarkable homogeneity across Africa, universally prioritising infrastructure, talent, and ethics. While this uniformity suggests that many African countries share similar development goals, there is a need for countries to focus on localised innovation that examines how AI strategies can complement and advance existing national priorities and strengthen growing industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, petrochemicals, and tourism. Fortunately, African nations appear to be increasingly leveraging the established architectures of Regional Economic Communities, which is necessary for reducing regulatory fragmentation. Regional coordination, especially across the Sahel and Central Africa, will be essential to pool scarce technical expertise, scale capacity building, and strengthen Africa's collective bargaining power against external technology providers.

2. External influences on AI and data governance in Africa

While Africa is developing its AI and data governance frameworks, many of these frameworks have been inspired by, shaped, or influenced by external factors, particularly the European Union, the United States and China. As African countries engage with these external actors, it is important that they safeguard their sovereignty over governance choices and strategically adopt or adapt elements of international frameworks that align with their national and regional priorities, while rejecting approaches that are unsuited to their local contexts. This section

examines the influence of the EU, US and China on AI and data governance in Africa.

2.1. EU: From Brussels Effect to AI Factories

A prominent actor that has consistently shaped personal data protection in Africa has been the European Union (EU). The EU is known for directly or indirectly shaping the global business environment through passing laws and regulations, and its regulations have previously been de facto global standards, resulting in this regulatory influence being dubbed 'the Brussels effect' (Bradford, 2019). A good example of the successful externalisation of EU law is the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of 2018, which was emulated by several African countries (Erforth and Martin-Shields, 2022). Even for countries like South Africa, which had adopted its Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) prior to the GDPR, discussions centred around how POPIA was similar to GDPR (Raghunandan, 2022). These comparisons and the copying and pasting of GDPR were primarily due to the fact that those doing business within the EU were bound by the extraterritorial provisions of the GDPR to comply. More specifically, Article 3(2) of the GDPR extends its application to certain organisations outside the EU where they process personal data of individuals in the EU in connection with offering goods or services to them or monitoring their behaviour. At the same time, some countries aligned their national laws with the GDPR for purposes of legal harmonisation with international best practice (Fidler, 2024; Abdulrauf, 2024).

When the EU adopted the EU AI Act, African policy circles questioned whether this would trigger another 'Brussels effect' (Musoni, 2024). This concern is warranted because Article 2 binds African AI developers and providers to its requirements where they place AI systems or general-purpose AI models on the EU market, or where the outputs of their AI systems are used in the EU. As with the GDPR, private companies may also press African governments to align with EU standards to reduce compliance costs.

Yet, even before the AI Act came into effect, the EU began to shift focus, following the Draghi Report on EU Competitiveness and reflecting the global shift at the time towards deregulation that was widely noted at the Paris AI Summit in February 2025 (See Brandusescu and Sieber, 2025; Joshi, 2025; Torchio, 2025). Indeed, during Ursula von der Leyen's second term as Commission President, the EU's focus has shifted significantly from a strong focus on regulating AI towards a much stronger focus on building infrastructure and supporting AI innovation. The AI Continent Action Plan aims to turn Europe into "a global leader in AI by accelerating the development, deployment and uptake of the technology across key sectors like healthcare, education, industry, and environmental sustainability." This includes setting up 19 AI Factories and 13 Antennas across the EU in order to

extend access to compute infrastructure and support for AI startups and SMEs, while the Apply AI Strategy aims to improve uptake of AI in industry, and the Cloud and AI Development Act aims to tackle overreliance on "non-EU cloud service providers." Another pillar of the action plan is referred to as regulatory "simplification", with the European Commission introducing the Digital Omnibus in November 2025, with the aim to "simplify" data rules, as well as extending deadlines under the AI Act. The EU is thus still in the process of building its own approach to AI governance and development more broadly.

However, while African AI laws may adopt selected elements of the EU AI Act, wholesale replication is unlikely. First, the evolving approaches to AI governance in both the United States and the EU offer different considerations for African countries. Although the US administration has prioritised innovation and deregulation, this position is not uniform, as some AI companies are advocating stronger regulatory safeguards (see next section). Similarly, the EU's approach has evolved beyond its initial emphasis on regulation, placing greater emphasis on competitiveness, investment in AI infrastructure and regulatory simplification as discussed above. Secondly, many African states have struggled to implement and enforce GDPR-style data protection laws and may avoid repeating that experience. Instead, they are developing AI policies tailored to local priorities and needs. Third, because Africa remains largely a consumer rather than a producer of AI technologies, its immediate priorities are more likely to be research capacity, skills development, and investments in AI and data infrastructure than comprehensive regulation.

Although the EU may not export the AI Act verbatim, it is still shaping national AI policy across Africa through development cooperation and strategic partnerships. Germany supported the development of the AU Data Policy Framework, and the EU-backed "Data governance in Africa" initiative has supported the African Union in implementation, and several African countries in developing frameworks for AI and data protection. This included supporting countries, such as Benin and Senegal, in developing national data and AI strategies. Broader initiatives such as the Global Gateway have also mobilised millions of euros for connectivity, e-government, skills, and regulatory capacity. The EU is now exploring how to expand investments in data centres, AI infrastructure and wider private sector engagement under the EU's Global Gateway Connectivity Strategy, but progress to date has been slow. The EU's recently adopted International Digital Strategy sets out how the EU intends to expand its global digital influence, including by using digital partnerships, policy and regulatory cooperation, capacity-building and investment, while promoting a rules-based global digital order and shaping global digital governance and standards in line with EU values and approaches.

Institutional cooperation provides another channel through which the EU influences AI governance in Africa, but as with its domestic agenda, the focus of the EU's international engagement is moving to AI infrastructure and AI applications. The EU AI Office is expected to lead the EU's international engagement on AI and promote the EU's approach to trustworthy AI, develop strategic partnerships and contribute to international AI governance. Meanwhile, the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) will also continue to support the EU's international digital ambitions with a focus on investments and technical support in partner countries. In Africa, bilateral engagement is complemented by institutional partnerships with organisations such as Smart Africa (EC, 2026). In December 2024, the EU and Smart Africa signed an administrative arrangement and grant agreement under the Global Gateway to support secure and affordable digital networks, expand e-government services, and explore the potential of AI. EU funding also creates opportunities to embed European standards in African digital projects. Programmes such as Horizon Europe, for example, require GDPR-compliant data practices, which reinforces EU norms on privacy, ethics and responsible data use within African research and innovation.

While the EU is shaping AI governance in Africa through its regulatory frameworks, development cooperation and institutional partnerships, the United States and China also play dominant roles. The United States' influence is reinforced by the market position of its tech companies, which operate across the AI value chain. On the other hand, China combines technology and infrastructure provision with state-led diplomacy on AI governance.

2.2. US

US influence in Africa operates both through formal diplomacy and structural technological dependence. US big tech companies such as Microsoft and Google increasingly participate in the construction of the technological and policy environment within which African AI governance develops. For example, Microsoft has invested $1 billion in Kenya to support the development of cloud infrastructure, AI development, connectivity, skills, and government cooperation, while Google's AI Policy Blueprint for Africa explicitly offers policy recommendations to African governments on infrastructure, cloud adoption, skills, and responsible AI. The influence of US firms is not confined to lobbying governments over individual regulatory proposals. These companies control important parts of the AI stack, particularly cloud computing infrastructure, advanced AI models and deployment platforms, which gives them a structural form of power. African governments seeking to expand AI adoption must often make decisions about cloud procurement, access to compute, and data

governance and public sector digital infrastructure in technological environments where US firms are major providers. As Obia (2025) argues, the geographical concentration of AI development and technological capabilities in advanced economies creates inequalities in the ability of African countries to shape AI governance. Mwema and Birhane (2024) demonstrate in their examination of submarine cable infrastructure in Africa that investments by US technology companies like Google and Meta raise important questions about corporate control over critical digital infrastructure and its implications for African digital sovereignty. These companies become participants in governance not simply because they advocate particular policies, but because the design of their technologies, contractual conditions, technical standards, and investment decisions can themselves shape what form of regulation is practically feasible (Grohmann and Barbosa, 2025). So while African countries seem to have sovereignty over how they regulate AI, the infrastructures, models and cloud services to which these regulations will apply are developed or controlled predominantly by US firms and institutions.

In 2022, the Biden Administration initiated the Digital Transformation with Africa (DTA) initiative whereby the US committed more than $800 million ($350 in investments and $450 in finance facilitation) to accelerate digital infrastructure development, human capital development, and creating an enabling environment. Assessment of the DTA has shown progress as the US was able to translate the initiative into concrete institutional structures and projects, investing over $82 million and establishing interagency mechanisms to coordinate implementation (Munga and Monye, 2024). However, with the second Trump Administration, the future of the initiative became uncertain. The DTA no longer appears to be maintained as a distinct programme, and there is no equivalent implementation framework announced under the new administration.

While the Biden Administration had made these efforts to support digital infrastructure development in Africa, some of its policy decisions specifically shaped AI governance in Africa. In January 2025, the US adopted the AI Diffusion Rule (later rescinded under the Trump Administration), which sought to control the movement of advanced AI models and semiconductors across the globe. It introduced a three-tier system where countries had different levels of access and compliance requirements for importing advanced AI chips and certain AI models. Tier 1 consisted of countries with unrestricted or minimally restricted imports, and no African country was in this category. Though the rule was rescinded, its significance is that the US can affect whether, where, and at what scale other countries can access advanced computing infrastructure.

The Trump Administration has shifted towards commercial diplomacy, investment in digital and AI infrastructure, and the promotion of American AI technologies (Executive Order, 2025). In 2025, the American AI Exports Program was launched to support the overseas deployment of US AI hardware, software, models, and infrastructure, while US agencies have continued to support digital infrastructure investments in Africa, including data centre development and investments in companies such as Cassava Technologies. The Trump Administration has taken a markedly different approach to AI regulation from that associated with the EU. This was made clear during the Paris AI Action Summit. Vice President J.D. Vance warned that excessive regulation could constrain the development of the industry and argued that the priority should be innovation rather than precautionary regulation. The US also declined to sign the Summit's Statement on inclusive and Sustainable AI, which emphasised AI that is open, inclusive, ethical, safe, secure and trustworthy. However, the US position on AI regulation is not uniform. Some leading American AI companies like Anthropic have advocated for stronger regulatory safeguards, including mandatory safety evaluations, independent oversight, transparency requirements and government intervention where advanced AI systems pose catastrophic risks (Rozen, 2026). Further, opposition to the speed of AI development was an important topic in the recent US midterm elections in November 2026, and the sweeping victory of the Democratic Party may lead to a significant shift in the US approach in the coming months, notably at the state level.

2.3 China

Some have observed that the US's approach to governing AI through offering access to its AI supply chain may not be enough, as countries like China may be seen to be offering the world better terms (Collins and Mehta, 2026). China's influence on AI governance in Africa should be understood against the backdrop of its longer-standing role in the continent's digital transformation. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, the Digital Silk Road and related China-Africa cooperation, Chinese firms have played a significant role in building telecommunications networks and other digital infrastructure across African countries. China's role in Africa is also evolving from being predominantly an infrastructure and technology partner towards becoming a participant in shaping the principles, institutions and international arrangements through which AI is governed. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Beijing Action Plan 2025-2027 explicitly incorporates artificial intelligence into China-Africa cooperation. The Action Plan states that the African side welcomes China's Global AI Governance Initiative and commits the two sides to cooperation on AI capacity-building, data governance, privacy, cybersecurity and international rule-making. It frames AI governance not just as a question of managing technological risks, but also as a question of development, technological

inequality and participation in global governance. China and African governments commit to bridging the AI and digital divides and support a global governance framework in which the United Nations plays a central role.

According to Collins and Mehta, China's Global Governance Initiative stresses national sovereignty, equality among states in their right to develop and use AI, respect for different national laws and social systems, open access to AI technologies and greater participation by developing countries in international AI governance (Collins and Mehta, 2026). While much of the debate among advanced economies has centred on frontier-model safety, systemic risk and the regulation of leading AI developers, China has increasingly linked AI governance to questions of developmental access, from compute, infrastructure, skills, technology transfer and the ability of developing countries to participate meaningfully in rule-making. This development-oriented framing can resonate with many African governments (Collins and Mehta, 2026).

China is also seeking to institutionalise this approach internationally. In July 2026, 29 countries signed the agreement establishing the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation (WAICO), an intergovernmental organisation headquartered in Shanghai. Its stated objectives include promoting international cooperation and global AI governance and strengthening the capacity of Global South countries in AI innovation, application and governance. WAICO potentially gives China a more durable institutional vehicle through which to translate its AI governance principles into international cooperation, rather than relying only on declarations and diplomatic initiatives (Reuters, 2026; Al Jazeera, 2026).

2.4. Global Summits

Global AI summits have become important fora for shaping AI governance and advancing norms on safety, innovation, inclusion, and accountability. African participation has often been limited and uneven, but these forums still matter because they determine whose priorities are reflected in emerging governance frameworks. Africa is increasingly using international fora as platforms to improve its visibility and advance its own priorities on AI governance. African countries, researchers and organisations have played an active role and participated at the UN level, including at the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance and the AI for Good Global Summit. These summits have created opportunities to advocate for infrastructure, skills, African languages, digital sovereignty, and fair access to computing resources. Summits in Bletchley Park, Seoul, Paris and India have also broadened the debate beyond frontier risks to include focusing on capacity-building, digital inclusion, development and access to AI resources. The 2025 Global AI Summit for Africa and the Continental AI Declaration also marked an important shift from participation in externally defined debates towards

setting a distinctly African agenda linking responsible AI to industrialisation, research, regional integration, and development.

What the above discussion has shown is that engagement with external actors and participation at global forums offers African countries opportunities for cooperation, knowledge exchange and capacity building. Rather than treating external influence as either inherently beneficial or detrimental, African countries need to engage strategically with these competing approaches, selectively adopting and adapting elements that align with their national and regional priorities.

3. Policy Implications for Africa's Next Stage of Digital Governance

The empirical landscape documented in this paper reveals a continent at a critical juncture in its digital trajectory. As of 2026, 44 countries have enacted data protection laws, and at least 22 have launched national AI strategies. This progress has moved Africa beyond nascent experimentation toward the development of systematic governance. Yet this apparent progress masks deeper structural tensions that carry profound implications for Africa's position in the global AI economy and its capacity to leverage digital technologies for sustainable development. Integrating perspectives of both AI and data governance reveals patterns invisible to narrower analyses: the foundational dependence of AI governance on data protection regimes, the tension between aspirational continental strategies and fragmented national implementation, and the paradox of accelerating policy formulation alongside persistent capacity deficits.

The disconnect between policy ambition and implementation capacity represents perhaps the most consequential finding of our work. Nearly every national AI strategy examined expresses the goal of becoming a 'regional leader' or a 'global AI hub'; yet, few articulate credible pathways from current conditions, marked by limited computing infrastructure, constrained technical talent pools, and nascent regulatory institutions, to these aspirational endpoints. The implications extend beyond unrealistic goal-setting. When governments invest scarce resources in strategy documents that remain unimplemented, they incur opportunity costs that could have been directed toward foundational infrastructure, skills development, or strengthening enforcement of existing data protection laws. Moreover, the proliferation of strategies without corresponding implementation risks creating what might be termed "governance theatre"

(Meyman, 2025), which is the appearance of regulatory sophistication masking the absence of functional oversight mechanisms.

The current trajectory, if unchanged, points toward several concerning possibilities for Africa's digital future. First, the implementation gap between policy ambition and governance capacity may widen rather than narrow. As AI systems grow more sophisticated and their deployment accelerates, the governance challenges intensify while institutional capacity develops slowly (Scherer, 2015). This creates a governance deficit where harmful AI deployments proceed largely unchecked due to weak enforcement mechanisms (Ilcic et al., 2025). Second, Africa's position as primarily a consumer of AI technologies may solidify into a permanent structural disadvantage. Without substantial investments in computing infrastructure, AI research capacity, and technical skills development, the continent risks missing value-creation opportunities of the AI revolution while bearing its costs and risks. Third, regulatory fragmentation may persist across jurisdictions, impeding the emergence of continental digital markets and reducing Africa's collective bargaining power in global AI governance negotiations.

Yet alternative trajectories remain possible. The rapid proliferation of data protection legislation demonstrates African countries' capacity for relatively swift policy adoption when there is strong political will, and external incentives align. However, converting these possibilities into realities requires addressing several fundamental challenges. First, African governments must prioritise implementation over strategy proliferation. Rather than continuously drafting new frameworks, focus should shift to strengthening the enforcement of existing data protection laws, building institutional capacity within data protection authorities, and creating mechanisms for regulatory compliance that account for resource constraints. This means investing in training for regulators, developing simplified compliance pathways for small and medium enterprises, and establishing monitoring systems that can function within budgetary limitations.

Second, governance efforts must recognise and address the hierarchical relationship between data governance and AI governance. Countries cannot build robust AI governance systems without first establishing functional data protection regimes. This sequencing matters: data sovereignty provisions, cross-border data transfer mechanisms, and individual rights over personal information constitute prerequisites for meaningful AI governance. Attempting to regulate AI applications without controlling the underlying data flows is akin to building on sand. African countries must therefore consolidate and strengthen data governance before layering AI-specific regulations, even as pressure mounts to address AI risks directly.

Third, regional harmonisation efforts require renewed commitment and institutional support. The fragmentation across Regional Economic Communities undermines continental integration goals and reduces Africa's collective influence in global governance debates. Harmonisation need not mean uniformity: different regions may adopt context-appropriate variations, but it requires sufficient coherence to enable cross-border data flows, mutual recognition of regulatory frameworks, and coordinated positions in international forums. The AU and Regional Economic Communities must move beyond developing model frameworks to actively supporting implementation, facilitating knowledge sharing, and mediating disputes that arise from regulatory divergences.

Fourth, African countries must strategically engage with external partners while safeguarding sovereignty over governance choices. This means moving beyond binary framings of external influence as either beneficial capacity building or harmful imposition. Instead, governance development should involve critical appropriation: selectively adopting elements from different international frameworks that align with African priorities while rejecting provisions unsuited to local contexts. It requires asserting African agency in partnership negotiations, insisting on mutual benefit rather than one-way technical assistance, and building sufficient domestic expertise to evaluate external proposals independently.

Fifth, governance systems must embed accountability mechanisms that connect high-level strategies to measurable outcomes. Too many current frameworks articulate aspirations without specifying metrics, timelines, or responsible institutions. Effective governance requires clear assignment of implementation responsibilities, regular monitoring and reporting on progress, transparent evaluation of what works and what fails, and adaptive mechanisms that allow for course corrections based on experience. The AU and national governments should establish dedicated monitoring frameworks that track not only policy adoption but actual implementation and impact.

Conclusion

Africa’s AI governance debate is moving from aspiration to implementation. The continent’s experience highlights the need to balance innovation with accountability, national sovereignty with international harmonisation, and policy ambition with institutional capacity. Effective governance will depend not only on frameworks, but also on infrastructure, technical expertise, enforcement capacity,

and sustained coordination across the African Union, regional bodies, national governments, civil society, industry, and academia.

The choices made now will shape whether Africa participates in the AI economy as an equal partner or remains primarily a source of data and a consumer of technologies developed elsewhere. Strong, locally grounded governance can ensure that African values, languages, and development priorities are reflected in AI systems, while protecting vulnerable communities and promoting a fair distribution of benefits. By aligning national strategies with a continental vision and closing capacity and infrastructure gaps, Africa can turn AI from promise into practical and equitable development.

Annexes

Annex 1: Country-by-Country Regulatory Matrix

Country	Data Protection Legislation	Data Protection Authority (DPA)	AI Strategy/ Policy	Recent Developments (2025-2026)
Algeria	Law No. 25-11 (modifies 2018 framework)	Autorité Nationale de Protection des Données (ANPDP)	National Strategy on AI Research & Innovation	Enacted Law 25-11 in July 2025 (5-day breach notification, mandatory DPOs). ANPDP issued compliance procedures.
Angola	Law No. 22/11 on Protection of Personal Data	Agência de Proteção de Dados (APD)	None	**Draft AI Law** introduced (imposes criminal penalties up to 12 years for misuse and hefty fines).
Benin	Law No. 2009-09	Autorité de Protection des Données (APDP)	National AI & Big Data Strategy (2023-2027)	Established a robust, structured ecosystem.
Botswana	Data Protection Act, 2024	Information and Data Protection Commission	None (In draft)	The Non-Bank Financial Institutions Regulatory Authority released the DP checklist (Sept 2025).
Burkina Faso	Act No. 001-2021/AN	Commission de l'informatique et des libertés (CIL)	None	Nascent stage framework.

Burundi	None	None	None	Minimal or absent governance activity.
Cameroon	Law No. 2024/017	Commission nationale (CNPDP) (Not yet operational)	National AI Strategy (SNIA)	SNIA launched in July 2025 targeting digital sovereignty, "GPT Cameroon", and 5 AI centres.
Cabo Verde	Law 133-V-2001 (amended 2021)	National Commission of Data Protection (CNPD)	None	Active data protection regime.
Central African Republic	None	None	None	Minimal or absent governance activity.
Chad	Law No. 007/PR/2015	Agence Nationale (ANSICE)	None	Nascent stage framework.
Comoros	None	None	None	Minimal or absent governance activity.
Côte d'Ivoire	Law 2013-450	Autorité de Régulation (ARTCI)	National AI & Data Governance Strategy	Launched AI & Data Strategy (March 2025) backed by $80M AfDB investment; creating "Safe AI" label.
DR Congo	Ordinance law 23/010 (Digital Code)	Autorité de régulation (ARPTC)	None	Establishing sovereign data centres.
Djibouti	Data Protection law (June 2025 Digital Code)	National Commission (CNDP) (Not yet operational)	None	Enacted Digital Code (June 2025). Includes post-mortem privacy and extraterritorial reach.
Egypt	Law No. 151 of 2020	Personal Data Protection Centre (PDPC)	National AI Strategy (2025-2030)	Launched 2nd Edition AI Strategy (Jan 2025); Exec. Regulations for PDPL issued (Nov 2025).
Equatorial Guinea	Law No. 1/2016	None	None	Nascent stage framework.
Eritrea	None	None	None	Minimal or absent governance activity.
Eswatini	Data	Eswatini	None (In	Establishing AI Academy via

	Protection Act No. 5 of 2022	Communications Commission (ESCCOM)	draft)	University of Eswatini.
Ethiopia	Personal Data Protection Proclamation 1321/2024	Ethiopian Communications Authority	National AI Policy	Comprehensive data protection proclamation active; growing deeptech hubs.
Gabon	Law No. 025/2023	Autorité pour la Protection (APDPVP)	None	Advanced institutional capacity: established UNESCO-validated CTN-IA (AI technical committee).
Gambia	Personal DP and Privacy Act, 2025	Information Commission	None	Enacted new Act (Sept 2025); National Child and Vulnerable Groups Online Protection Policy.
Ghana	Data Protection Act, 2012	Data Protection Commission (DPC)	National AI Strategy (2025-2035)	Launched Ghana AI Practitioners' Guide (Sept 2025).
Guinea	Law No. L/2016/037/AN	None	None	Nascent stage framework.
Guinea-Bissau	None	None	None	Minimal or absent governance activity.
Kenya	Data Protection Act, 2019	Office of the Data Protection Commissioner (ODPC)	National AI Strategy (2025-2030)	Strategy launched March 2025; **AI Bill** was under Senate debate but was rejected as of October 2026; ODPC is issuing active enforcement fines. The ODPC published draft guidance notes covering Artificial Intelligence, Emerging Technologies, and Privacy-Enhancing Technologies. Kenya published the Draft Artificial Intelligence and Other Emerging Technologies Policy, 2026 to establish a central regulatory authority and risk-based governance framework for the country.
Lesotho	Data Protection	None	None	Secured $6.2B pledge for green AI data centre.

	Act, 2011			
Liberia	None (Under Review)	None	None	House of Representatives reviewing Personal Data Protection Act (June 2025).
Libya	Law No. 6 of 2022	National Information Security Authority (NISSA)	Artificial Intelligence National Policy	Launched AI Policy (2025-2030) despite state fragility.
Madagascar	Law No. 2014-038	Commission Malagasy (CMIL)	None	Nascent stage framework.
Malawi	Data Protection Act, 2024	Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA)	None	MACRA officially inaugurated as DPA (Jan 2025). Launched the Child Online Protection Initiative.
Mali	Law No. 2013/015 (amended 2017)	Autorité de Protection (APDP)	None	Nascent stage framework.
Mauritania	Law No. 2017-020	Autorité de Protection	National Artificial Intelligence Strategy of Mauritania 2024–2029	Nascent-stage framework.
Mauritius	Data Protection Act 2017	Data Protection Office (DPO)	National AI Strategy (2025-2029)	Launched FAIR Guidelines (April 2026); FSC Guidance Notes on AI in FinServ (Sept 2025).
Morocco	Law No. 09-08	Commission Nationale (CNDP)	Maroc IA 2030 - national artificial intelligence roadmap	**Draft Law Regulating AI** in Parliament (ex-ante obligations, high-risk bans).
Mozambique	None (Draft in progress)	None	None	Finalising comprehensive draft Personal Data Protection Law (2025).
Namibia	None (Drafts in progress)	None	None	Finalising AI Act, Data Protection Bill, and Cybercrime Bill.

Niger	Law N° 2022-59 (amended 2023)	Haute Autorité (HAPDP)	None	Formalised legal DP infrastructure. Niger's National Digital Development Policy for 2026–2035 is a strategic roadmap aimed at accelerating the country's digital transformation, bridging the digital divide, and positioning Niger as a regional interconnection hub.
Nigeria	Data Protection Act, 2023	Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC)	National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (NAIS) 2025-2029	Massive 2025 agenda: NDP Act-GAID issued; Draft bills for Digital Sovereignty & AI Commission.
Republic of Congo	Law No. 29-2019	Commission nationale (CNPD)	None	CNPD established early 2025; Hosts ARCAI (Africa's first dedicated AI research centre).
Rwanda	Law No. 058/2021	National Cyber Security Authority	National AI Policy (April 2023)	Ranked highest in AAIGI index. Established Responsible AI Office; hosted Global AI Summit on Africa.
Sao Tome & Prin.	Law No. 03/2016	Agência Nacional (ANPDP)	None	Nascent stage framework.
Senegal	Law No. 2008-12	Commission de Protection (CDP)	National Strategy for the Developme nt of Artificial Intelligence (SNDIA)	CDP issued active warnings on unregulated AI and deepfakes (May 2026).
Seychelles	Data Protection Act, 2023	Information Commission	None	High connectivity but minimal local data storage.
Sierra Leone	National Data Protection Policy approved on April 21, 2026	None	None	Sierra Leone is actively developing its first comprehensive National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy. Spearheaded by the Ministry of Communication, Technology and Innovation

				(MoCTI) alongside the World Bank Group, the nation is building a framework focused on ethical, inclusive, and impact-driven AI deployment tailored to local development needs.
Somalia	Law No. 005 of 2023	Somali Data Protection Authority	None	Formalised legal DP infrastructure.
South Africa	POPIA, 2021	The Information Regulator	None (Draft withdrawn)	Withdrew Draft AI policy in April 2026 due to hallucinated citations. Strict POPIA enforcement.
South Sudan	None	None	None	Minimal governance activity.
Sudan	None	Data & Artificial Intelligence Authority	None	Decree establishing Data & AI Authority, Cyber Authority (Nov 2025) amid conflict.
Tanzania	Personal Data Protection Act 2022	Personal Data Protection Commission	None	Deliberating DP Fees Regulations (2025); High Court upheld data privacy enforcement fines.
Togo	Law No. 2019-014	Instance de Protection (IPDCP)	None	IPDCP operationalised March 2025. Togo Data Lab is actively deploying AI for public policy.
Tunisia	Organic Act No. 2004-63	Instance Nationale (INPDP)	National AI Strategy and Roadmap (2021–2025)	Mature strategy presence.
Uganda	DP and Privacy Act, 2019	Personal Data Protection Office (PDPO)	None	PDPO launched DP and Privacy Toolkit (Feb 2025); imprisoned a non-compliant digital lender director. Drafting of the National AI & Emerging Technologies Strategy is underway.
Zambia	Data Protection Act No. 3 of 2021	Data Protection Commission (ODPC)	National AI Strategy (2024-2027)	Strategy published Feb 2025. ODPC commenced formal registration guidelines.

Zimbabwe	Data Protection Act (Act 5/2021)	POTRAZ	National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy (2026–2030)	POTRAZ published Licensing Guidelines (2025); Advanced 'Ubuntu-centred' AI framework guidelines.

Source: ECDPM. The status of AI strategies across the continent is changing fast. These labels reflect information available up to 2025-26.

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