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AI and Political Decision-Making: Evidence from the Italian Parliament

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Abstract

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into public decision-making offers opportunities for greater efficiency and regulatory coherence, while reshaping the role of the legislator. Algorithms capable of processing complex data, simulating policy scenarios, and supporting legislative drafting challenge traditional notions of political judgment and responsibility.

Gouiaa and Bazarna (2023) show how AI reconfigures the balance between rationality and politics in governance systems, while Aydoğan et al. (2021) emphasize its potential in negotiation and conflict mediation. At the same time, concerns remain regarding opacity, bias, and accountability (Horowitz & Lin-Greenberg, 2022).

AI thus presents a dual dynamic: it can enhance legislative clarity and impact assessment, yet it also raises risks for democratic oversight. Rather than replacing lawmakers, AI redefines their role, requiring stronger interpretative skills, institutional safeguards, and sustained human control within an emerging socio-algorithmic ecosystem.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; Decision Making; Governance; Politics.*

1. Introduction

In consolidated democratic systems, the foundational role of legal norms is both evident and indispensable. They constitute the structural framework within which the relationship between public institutions and citizens is articulated. Legal norms not only define the boundaries of individual behavior, functioning as regulatory devices, but also represent the primary channel through which collective will is formalized and made operational. In this capacity, they ensure harmony between personal autonomy and the broader demands of democratic life. Norms thus assume a central role not only in the organization of public governance, but also in shaping

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individual experiences, affecting profound existential dimensions such as birth, health, and death, as in the case of euthanasia.

In this context, legislative drafting emerges as a domain characterized by high political density and marked ethical responsibility. Legislators are entrusted with the authority to translate principles that affect the daily lives of millions into binding provisions; consequently, their decisions carry far-reaching social implications. From a utilitarian perspective, legislation can be understood as an instrument through which elected representatives provide public goods to citizens, thereby contributing to the construction of trust and the legitimation of political power, often measured through electoral consent.

Within this framework, parliaments and legislative assemblies function as institutional arenas in which plural interests are expressed, negotiated, and reconciled. The essence of representative democracy lies precisely in this dialectical dynamic: a process through which divergent perspectives converge into coherent legal outcomes. However, this process is not immune to failure. The inability to pass broadly supported proposals - due to misunderstandings, ambiguous drafting, or regulatory overload - reveals structural inefficiencies. Such outcomes do not depend solely on political opposition, but often also on cognitive or linguistic misalignment between the complexity of a norm and legislators' capacity to adequately assess it.

This issue falls within a broader conception of legislative quality, understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing both formal and informal criteria. From a formal standpoint, it concerns the internal coherence of the legal text, its compatibility with the existing legal framework, the robustness of the deliberative process, and the norm's resilience to judicial scrutiny. From an informal standpoint, legislative quality is measured in terms of communicative clarity, practical applicability, and perceived legitimacy among citizens. In short, the more accessible, intelligible, and socially shared a norm is, the greater the likelihood that it will be respected, uniformly applied, and internalized in everyday practice.

2. Cost of bad laws

Italy represents a paradigmatic example of what is commonly referred to as "legislative inflation." With a body of legislation estimated at approximately 160,000 laws currently in force - of which more than 71,000 at the national level and around 89,000 enacted by regional and local authorities - the Italian legal system stands out in Europe for its high degree of complexity and the sheer volume of legislative output. By comparison, legal systems such as those of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom appear significantly more streamlined, with approximately 7,000, 5,500, and 3,000 active legislative provisions respectively, according to data provided by the CGIA Research Office of Mestre. This normative proliferation burdens

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not only citizens and legal practitioners, but also generates uncertainty, delays, and inefficiencies in administrative action and judicial implementation.

This phenomenon, known as "regulatory uncertainty," also has significant macroeconomic implications, as demonstrated by recent empirical studies (Giommoni, Guiso et al., 2024), and urgently calls for deeper reflection on the potential of artificial intelligence to support the drafting of clearer, more interpretable, and more coherent legislative texts. According to the evidence gathered in the cited research, uncertainty - and legal uncertainty in particular - constitutes one of the main obstacles to economic growth.

More specifically, the study finds that the probability of disagreement among judges of the Italian Supreme Court (Corte di Cassazione) in identical cases stands at approximately 30%, rising to 36% in the presence of poorly drafted legislative texts and declining to 24% when formulations are clearer. On average, every 100 words of legislative text contain more than four cross-references to other norms, while 85% of legislative sentences exceed 25 words in length. The economic impact attributable to this linguistic and structural ambiguity has been estimated at approximately €110 billion annually, equivalent to around 5% of national GDP.

Despite the establishment, as early as 1997, of the Parliamentary Committee for Legislation with the objective of overseeing legislative clarity, its effectiveness appears limited: between 2023 and 2024, only 20% of its formal conditions were accepted by Parliament, fewer than 10% of its general observations were incorporated, and more than 40% of its opinions were issued during the final reading of the texts, at which stage amendments are no longer admissible.

These data point to a systemic failure: the institutional apparatus is aware of linguistic shortcomings, yet structurally unable to correct them. In this context, artificial intelligence offers a promising avenue for improving the quality of legislative production and could support the work of parliamentary committees through the automated generation of reports on textual readability, comparative legal analysis, and redrafting recommendations. Since, as illustrated by the Italian case, normative overproduction is not merely a technical imperfection but a structural one, this study aims to highlight the opinions of Italian Members of Parliament regarding these tools and to assess whether they consider them useful for building a more efficient legislative ecosystem.

3. A short preamble on AI

In recent years, the spread of Artificial Intelligence - particularly generative models - has significantly reshaped the global technological and organizational landscape. While earlier research focused mainly on computational power and performance benchmarks, attention has increasingly shifted toward human-AI interaction, seeking to understand how and why individuals use these tools in everyday contexts. According to Sanders (Harvard Business

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School, 2024), the period 2023 - 2025 marked a turning point, as generative AI moved from an emerging technology to a widespread socio-technical system integrated into professional, educational, creative, and decision-making settings.

Their findings suggest that AI adoption is driven less by a desire for innovation *per se* and more by perceived usefulness and the ability to solve concrete problems. People tend to use AI pragmatically, valuing it as a collaborative cognitive partner rather than a mere automation tool. The most common applications include writing support, idea generation, workflow organization, and assistance in complex decisions.

This shift also entails a methodological change: beyond technical performance metrics, researchers now emphasize the need to study real-world use, trust dynamics, user experience, and organizational impact. AI has thus entered a mature phase of social adoption, where perceived effectiveness and contextual integration are crucial, raising important questions about governance, regulation, risks, and opportunities for empowerment and democratic transformation.

4. Research question

The study seeks to assess the extent to which Italian parliamentarians consider such a development plausible, what they regard as its indispensable limits, and which risks they perceive in this regard. As in the examples mentioned earlier, far from replacing political judgment, AI appears here as a transformative medium of normative praxis, shifting parliamentary decisions from solitary authorship to collective synthesis, and from ideological mediation to computational evaluation.

The experiment that follows aims to lay the conceptual foundations for future empirical investigations, opening the way to pilot projects in AI-assisted legislative drafting, ethnographic observations of interactions between decision-makers and algorithmic interfaces, and the desirable development of indicators for regulatory quality and perceived legitimacy.

The primary objective is an understanding of the level of “acceptability” among Members of Italian Parliament in the face of a possible legislative ecosystem capable - through the support of AI - of codifying compromise without erasing deliberation, and of being at once intelligent, fair, and democratically accountable.

4.1 Data collection

The survey was designed with the aim of collecting empirical evidence on the perceptions, reservations, and willingness of Italian Members of Parliament regarding the integration of Artificial Intelligence into legislative processes. The objective was twofold: on the one hand, to explore the degree of openness, interest, and awareness among public decision-makers

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concerning the adoption of AI in legislative work; on the other, to identify potential cognitive, cultural, and institutional barriers that may positively or negatively influence the process of technological integration within parliamentary mechanisms.

Here is the revised version, integrating the representativeness argument without weakening the methodological positioning:

The chosen methodology allowed for a combination of rigor in data collection and qualitative sensitivity to subjective perceptions, providing an initial exploratory mapping useful for designing future large-scale studies.

The adoption of a qualitative methodology also made it possible to complement codifiable data with interpretative elements, which are particularly valuable when investigating a topic that remains underexplored in the Italian political context. Data collection took place between December 2025 and January 2026 through digital administration (via secure online form and one-to-one interviews), following informed consent procedures.

4.2 Sample

The sample consists of 20 Members of Italian Parliament in office at the time of the survey.

Participants were selected to ensure political balance, including five representatives from each of the four main parties in Parliament, with representation from both governing majority and opposition: Fratelli d'Italia, Forza Italia, Partito Democratico, and Movimento 5 Stelle.

This ensured a balanced representation across the political spectrum. Additional participants were included to broaden the diversity of the sample.

The sample is heterogeneous with respect to

Gender: ≃ 70% men; ≃ 30% women

Chamber of affiliation (Chamber of Deputies and Senate of Republic): 71% CD; 29% SR

Number of legislative terms served (from one to more than two): 43% (1 served); 57% (2 or more)

Age: ≃ 43% (between 30 and 45 years old); ≃ 56% (over 45 years old).

These variables were collected through initial demographic questions and serve to contextualize responses, allowing for the assessment of possible correlations between political background and perceptions of AI.

While the study does not aim to provide large-scale computational validation, its qualitative exploratory design is intentional and methodologically coherent with its objective of capturing elite perceptions in an underexplored domain. By directly engaging sitting MPs, it generates

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high-resolution, context-rich evidence that is typically inaccessible to data-intensive approaches; notably, the sample - though limited (n=20) - represents approximately 3.33% of the parliamentary population, with each MP accounting for around 100,000 citizens, thus ensuring a meaningful degree of representativeness.

Rather than competing with computational social science, this study operates upstream, identifying key variables, attitudes, and institutional constraints necessary to inform future large-scale and NLP-driven research. In this sense, it provides the conceptual and empirical groundwork for subsequent, more technically complex investigations.

4.3 Questionnaire

The questionnaire administered to Members of Parliament consists of 20 questions structured into four thematic sections, each of which was designed to explore specific dimensions of the interaction between artificial intelligence and parliamentary work, including personal experience, knowledge and preconceptions about AI, and overall acceptability of AI intervention within the legislative process. Specifically:

Section 1 - Role of the MP and decision-making processes: examined the level of familiarity and knowledge of AI, focusing on prior experiences, personal or institutional use of digital tools, and understanding of key concepts related to models, data, and algorithms;

Section 2 - Technical and analytical benefits: focused on the willingness and acceptability of AI use in parliamentary activity, including support for legislative drafting, assistance in comparative analysis, and evaluation of the economic and social impacts of laws;

Section 3 - Transparency, comprehensibility, and consensus: addressed ethical and political concerns, exploring issues such as transparency, decision-making accountability, the risk of delegation to automated systems, and potential consequences for democratic representation;

Section 4 - Risks, limits, and governance: gathered perceptions regarding limits and barriers to AI adoption, with particular emphasis on conditions deemed unacceptable and constraints considered indispensable for a legitimate and responsible use of such tools.

The questionnaire structure was designed to capture nuanced perspectives and generate insights into regulatory acceptability, openness to change, and awareness of the risks associated with integrating AI into parliamentary work.

4.4 Results

The initial hypothesis was to observe an ambivalent attitude, characterized by a combination of technical openness and political caution. In particular, it was expected that Members of Parliament with fewer legislative terms would show a greater propensity to adopt new tools, whereas those with longer parliamentary careers would display a more critical stance toward

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implementation and a stronger inclination to impose constraints on the use of AI in decision-making processes.

The charts that follow illustrate the evaluations expressed by the interviewed parliamentarians regarding the use of artificial intelligence in legislative processes. The data are organized by thematic areas and present, in a synthetic form, the average levels of agreement or concern recorded for each questionnaire item.

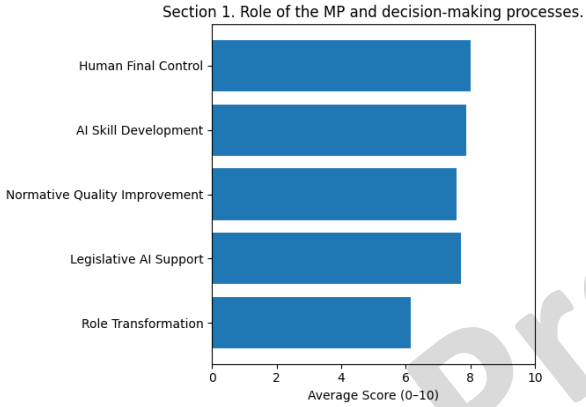


Figure 1. Section 1. Role of the MP and decision-making processes.

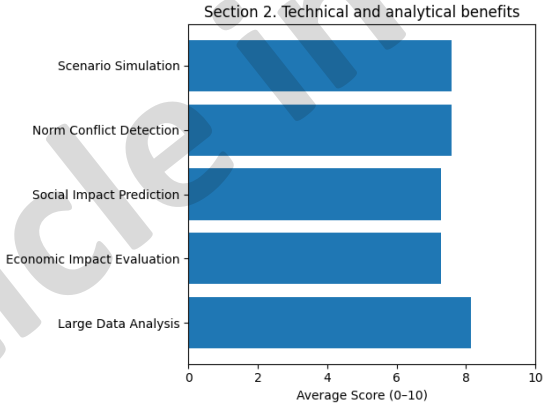


Figure 2. Section 2. Technical and analytical benefits

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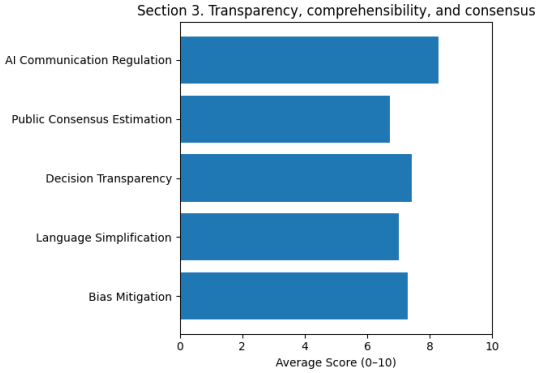


Figure 3. Section 3. Transparency, comprehensibility, and consensus

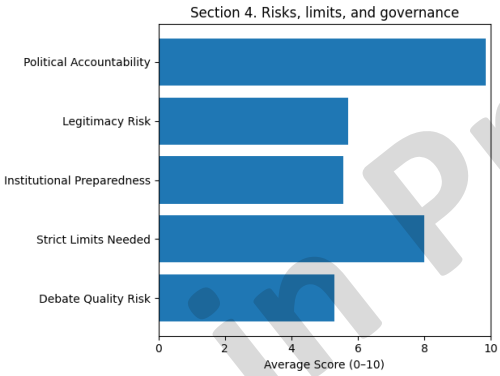


Figure 4. Section 4. Risks, limits, and governance

The interview results reveal a broadly shared confidence in artificial intelligence tools, albeit tempered by a prudent attitude and a clear awareness of the need to maintain firm human oversight in decision-making processes. This confidence appears to reflect a cross-cutting sensitivity toward the potential of AI in the normative domain and, more generally, a significant openness to its integration into parliamentary activities.

5. Prospects

The present study represents a first systematic attempt to explore the perception and acceptability of artificial intelligence among political decision-makers within the Italian Parliament. Its element of originality lies in the direct involvement of sitting members of Parliament, which made it possible to collect qualitative data on a dimension that has so far received limited scholarly attention namely, the political readiness of representative institutions in the face of the growing integration of AI systems into deliberative processes.

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The findings show that the issue is perceived as relevant, timely, and far from straightforward. Artificial intelligence is recognized as a potential resource for improving legislative quality, transparency, and the efficiency of parliamentary work. At the same time, concerns emerge regarding the possible loss of political control, automated delegation, and the democratic legitimacy of algorithmically assisted decisions. This balance between technical openness and institutional caution reflects a tension typical of technological transition phases, in which innovation must engage with established structures, legal language, and democratic sensitivities.

The study opens several avenues for further research. Future developments could include expanding the sample to other contexts, such as regional parliaments, European assemblies, or local deliberative bodies, as well as developing replicable indicators of parliamentary AI readiness, useful for longitudinal or cross-national comparisons. In this sense, future research could provide an empirical foundation for guiding institutional policies, training strategies, and digital tools aimed at building a legislative ecosystem that is more intelligent, accessible, and democratically sustainable.

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