

Satellite Event in Portugal: *Smart Governance: Territorial Cohesion, Democratic Participation and Artificial Intelligence*

As part of [Open Week of Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences \(DCSPT\)](#), 2025 and in alignment with the overarching theme of the World Forum for Democracy 2025 – “*Democracy at Risk: How Can We Revive It?*” – the University of Aveiro organized a satellite event focused on the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into models of democratic governance, which took place at the Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences (DCSPT), on 22 May 2025. The title of the panel discussion was conceived by the Department of

The panel titled “Smart Governance: Territorial Cohesion, Democratic Participation and Artificial Intelligence” promoted an interdisciplinary discussion on how emerging technologies are reshaping public decision-making processes, territorial equity, and citizen trust in democratic institutions.

Four speakers brought their expertise in cybersecurity, responsible artificial intelligence, digital governance, and electoral justice to the panel. The session was moderated by Mário Campolargo (Professor at the University of Aveiro) and Nuno da Cruz (Principal Researcher at the University of Aveiro), who guided the conversation with strategic questions and facilitated an engaging and critical dialogue among the panelists.



Pedro Latoeiro

An expert in global digital governance and Representative of the Center for Cooperation in Cyberspace, Pedro Latoeiro advocates for international cooperation in cyberspace. His work addresses cybersecurity policy fragmentation, the need for shared norms, and the importance of multilateral dialogue. His participation contributed to the design of more effective global governance mechanisms in a rapidly evolving and interdependent digital environment.



Helena Moniz

Helena Moniz, Senior Researcher at INESC-ID Lisbon & Faculty Member, University of Lisbon, is a leading voice in computational linguistics and responsible AI. With expertise in speech processing, machine translation, and language technology ethics, she currently chairs the Ethics Committee of the Center for Responsible AI. Her work bridges language, technology, and ethics to promote innovation in human-centered AI systems.



António Gameiro Marques

As Director-General of the Portuguese National Security Office and head of the National Cybersecurity Centre, António Gameiro Marques is a national reference in cybersecurity and digital transformation of the public sector. Former CIO of the Portuguese Navy and NATO liaison, he brings vast experience in information security and technology modernization within public administration.



Gilmar José Fernandes de Deus

Judge at the Regional Electoral Court of Paraná, Brazil, Gilmar José Fernandes de Deus, brought a critical South American perspective on AI and democracy. He has contributed to discussions on digitalization, electoral integrity, and technological impacts on democratic governance in Brazil. His insights highlighted both the risks and potential of AI for institutional trust and equitable civic engagement in developing democracies.

The panel aimed to critically analyse the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on democratic governance and territorial cohesion, exploring how these technologies are reshaping decision-making processes and public administration. It also sought to showcase concrete initiatives and good practices where AI is being used to foster citizen participation and improve both equity and efficiency in public policy. Additionally, the session reflected on the ethical challenges associated with AI in the public sector, highlighting the need for transparency, accountability, and responsible innovation. Finally, one of the key goals was to generate practical policy recommendations to be submitted to the Council of Europe, contributing to the broader dialogue promoted by the World Forum for Democracy 2025.

SESSION SUMMARY

The session was structured as a dynamic roundtable discussion, driven by a series of well-prepared “icebreaker” questions posed by the moderators to encourage reflection and exchange among the speakers. The conversation began with an overview of the current state of AI adoption in public administration, with specific insights into the Portuguese and Brazilian contexts. This allowed for a comparative perspective on how public institutions are engaging with emerging technologies and what challenges they face in doing so.

Participants then explored concrete and inspiring examples of successful implementation of digital tools in governance, highlighting cases where AI and data science have contributed to more transparent, participatory, and efficient decision-making. The debate also addressed the role of supranational institutions—such as the European Union, the United Nations and international regulatory bodies—in establishing ethical and legal frameworks for AI, emphasizing the importance of multilateral cooperation in this field.

A key part of the session focused on the risks associated with the use of AI in the public sector, including algorithmic bias, opacity in automated processes, and the potential for digital exclusion of vulnerable populations. The discussion also raised critical questions about the balance between impartiality and human judgment in public decisions shaped or supported by AI. Lastly, the panel examined whether these technologies are likely to reduce or exacerbate territorial inequalities, particularly in regions with limited digital infrastructure. The session concluded with an open and forward-looking discussion on the broader implications of AI for democracy, citizen trust, and inclusive development.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The discussion highlighted that artificial intelligence offers significant opportunities to strengthen democratic participation, particularly by improving access to information, responsiveness, and citizen engagement. However, these benefits are only achievable if accompanied by robust safeguards that ensure transparency, accountability, and fairness. One of the main challenges identified was the urgent need for both technical and ethical training within public sector institutions, to prepare professionals for the responsible use of AI. Concerns were also raised about the potential risks to

territorial cohesion, especially if algorithmic systems fail to consider local contexts and disparities, as well as the affective, emotional and cognitive bonds established in a region by the proximity dimension. The role of supranational organizations emerged as essential in defining shared ethical standards and regulatory frameworks to guide AI development and implementation. Finally, participants agreed that technology must remain citizen-centered, prioritising inclusive access, democratic legitimacy, and public trust at every stage of its adoption.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussions held, the panel proposed a set of policy recommendations to guide the responsible use of artificial intelligence in public governance. First, it is essential to develop national and regional legal and ethical frameworks that ensure AI applications align with democratic values and human rights. The promotion of international cooperation and knowledge exchange was emphasized as a way to share best practices and support capacity-building across countries and institutions. To strengthen public trust, the implementation of algorithmic transparency mechanisms—including external audits, public oversight, and citizen feedback channels—was recommended. Finally, the creation of territorial observatories for democratic innovation was proposed to systematically monitor the impact of AI on social equity, public participation, and local governance dynamics through evidence-based analysis.

The satellite event attracted approximately 150 participants, including students, researchers, and public officials, reflecting strong interest in the relationship between emerging technologies and democratic governance. The initiative contributed to elevating the international visibility of the Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences (DCSPT), reinforced collaboration with public institutions and global research centers, and enriched the public discourse on democracy and technology with both applied and theoretical insights. In addition, the event was actively shared on social media platforms—including [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#)—expanding its outreach and engaging a broader audience beyond the academic context. The session was also live-streamed for participants of the [International Conference on Public Policy and Data Science \(CIPPCD\)](#), further extending its impact within the academic and policy-making communities. A recording of the session is available, ensuring continued access and dissemination of the discussions held.