

Divergent Architectures of Trust: Comparative Lessons from AI Governance

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ABSTRACT

Across contemporary legal systems, states pursue notably different approaches to AI governance. The European framework conceptualises regulatory distrust as a structural safeguard: by institutionalising skepticism toward decision-making power, it seeks to generate social trust through transparency, contestability and constitutional oversight. The United Arab Emirates operates on a fundamentally different epistemology of governance. Instruments such as the UAE Charter for the Development and Use of Artificial Intelligence reveal a system in which regulatory distrust is not treated as a normative virtue. Instead, social trust is cultivated through coherent state direction and alignment with national strategic objectives.

Federal Decree-Law No. 33 of 2021 on the Regulation of Employment Relationships modernises labour relations by promoting predictable standards and employer obligations. Likewise, the AI Charter frames responsible AI development within a coordinated, state-led ecosystem. In this architecture, trust emerges not from institutionalised suspicion but from the perceived competence, continuity and centrality of state authority.

The contrast becomes clearer when compared with the U.S. and China. In the U.S., regulatory distrust is channelled through markets and litigation, producing reactive social trust. In China, distrust is exercised top-down as an instrument of state control, not as a safeguard protecting societal actors.

Without such adjustment of the fragile antinomy between regulatory distrust and social trust, the Copernican shift introduced by AI risks eroding not only established rights and freedoms, but also the trust upon which institutional legitimacy ultimately depends.

Keywords: AI regulatory trajectories; comparative legal disciplines; Emirati statutory frameworks; regulatory distrust; social trust