

# CAPSTONE BRIEF

## **Strengthening AI Governance in Kenyan County Assemblies: A framework for Ethical and Effective AI use in Legislative Processes and Oversight.**

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# Executive Summary

Kenya's legislative institutions are increasingly exploring the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to support research, legislative drafting, Hansard transcription, workflow management and public participation.<sup>1</sup> These developments present an opportunity to enhance efficiency, improve evidence-based decision-making and strengthen institutional capacity. However, there is currently no clear governance framework guiding the ethical, transparent and accountable use of AI within legislative processes, particularly at the county level. This gap is emerging at a critical moment: Kenya is adopting a National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (2025–2030) and considering AI-related legislation, while continental bodies such as the Pan-African Parliament are calling on legislatures to lead AI governance and protect human rights.

County assemblies play a central role in law-making, oversight of county executives and representation of citizens. Yet they face persistent capacity constraints, high workloads and limited access to research support. Without clear internal rules, AI adoption risks breaching data-protection obligations, introducing opaque or biased decision-support tools, and undermining public trust in democratic institutions. Conversely, failure to engage with AI may leave county assemblies unable to strengthen oversight, improve legislative quality or meet growing expectations for inclusive public participation.

This capstone uses the Kiambu County Assembly as a primary case study to examine how county legislatures can adopt AI to enhance efficiency and inclusion while respecting constitutional values, democratic accountability, and public trust.<sup>3</sup> The project maps current and potential AI use cases, identifies legal, ethical and institutional gaps, and benchmarks emerging African and global practices on AI use in parliaments and digital legislatures.

Through desk review, comparative analysis, key informant interviews, and stakeholder validation, the project proposes a practical governance framework and a model internal policy to guide the responsible use of AI in county assemblies. The expected outcome is a policy-relevant tool that county assemblies can adapt to ensure AI strengthens, rather than undermines, democratic decision-making, aligned with Kenya's national AI strategy and broader African governance priorities.



## 1.0 Problem Statement

AI tools capable of supporting legislative drafting, summarisation, budget analysis and oversight are becoming increasingly accessible to public institutions.<sup>6</sup> In Kenya, discussions have begun on integrating AI into parliamentary operations and on regulating AI at the national level, including through proposed robotics and AI-related legislation.<sup>7</sup> However, there is limited guidance for county assemblies on whether, when and how AI may be used within their core legislative, oversight and representative functions.

This governance gap creates several risks. Sensitive legislative data may be processed by external AI systems without adequate safeguards, raising concerns about confidentiality and compliance with data protection obligations. AI-assisted outputs may be opaque, biased or poorly contextualised, particularly where tools are trained on non-local data. Overreliance on automated analysis risks weakening human judgment, while the non-transparent use of AI may erode public trust in legislative institutions.

At the same time, without structured experimentation and clear governance frameworks, county assemblies risk missing opportunities to use AI to strengthen research capacity, improve scrutiny of budgets and audit reports, and expand citizen engagement. Given the growing complexity of county governance and the resource constraints facing assemblies, there is a clear need for a county-level framework that balances innovation with safeguards.

## 2.0 Purpose of the Project and Objectives

- 1 Assess Kenya's current policy and institutional readiness for the use of AI in legislative processes, with a focus on county assemblies and their legal mandates.
- 2 Evaluate African and global best practices on AI use in parliaments and oversight institutions.
- 3 Propose a model framework for ethical, transparent and effective AI adoption in the legislative, oversight and representative functions of county assemblies, using Kiambu County Assembly as a case study.
- 4 Engage key stakeholders within Kiambu County Assembly to identify institutional needs, concerns and priorities regarding AI use
- 5 Support alignment between county-level AI governance and national AI strategies, parliamentary initiatives and emerging AI legislation.
- 6 Develop a model internal policy or guideline that county assemblies can adapt to govern the use of AI in legislative business.



### 3.0 Political Economy and Democratic Implications

AI does not render legislators redundant, as legislative authority derives from a democratic mandate, political judgment, and accountability to citizens. However, AI may be perceived as a threat when it alters information flows, exposes capacity gaps, or increases transparency in decision-making. These concerns reflect broader political-economy dynamics rather than technological displacement.

When properly governed, AI can strengthen democracy by improving legislative quality, enhancing oversight of executive action and expanding access to information for both legislators and the public. Poorly governed AI, by contrast, risks concentrating power in technical units or external vendors, obscuring decision-making and undermining public trust. For county assemblies, internal AI governance frameworks are essential to ensure AI supports, rather than substitutes for, democratic judgment and accountability.

### 4.0 Stakeholder Mapping

National Assembly and Senate	Shape national AI legislation and policy direction.
Parliamentary Service Commission and ICT Units	Manage digital infrastructure and technology governance.
Kiambu County Assembly ( <i>Speaker, Clerk, Committees</i> )	Approve and implement internal AI governance frameworks.
County Assembly ICT & Research Units	Operationalise AI tools and ensure technical compliance.
Ministry responsible for ICT	Coordinate national AI strategy and standards.
Civil society & legal-tech organisations	Provide oversight on democracy, rights and accountability.
Academic institutions	Generate evidence and comparative analysis.
Private AI vendors	Supply AI tools subject to governance and procurement rules



## 5.0 Significance

While the nation is currently moving toward a National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (2025–2030), there exists a yawning governance gap at the sub-national level. By focusing specifically on county assemblies, this project addresses a pivotal tier of government that handles essential law-making, executive oversight, and citizen representation but lacks the internal rules necessary to manage AI ethically and transparently.

County assemblies face persistent capacity constraints and high workloads, making the allure of AI-driven research, legislative drafting, and Hansard transcription high. However, without the framework proposed by this project, the adoption of AI threatens to lead to data protection breaches, opaque decision-making, and the use of biased tools trained on non-local data. This Capstone acts as a safeguard, ensuring that the transition to digital legislatures does not erode the confidentiality of sensitive legislative data or the integrity of human judgment.

The Capstone explores the political-economy and democratic implications of AI, arguing that legislative authority must remain rooted in a democratic mandate rather than technological output. It highlights a profound risk: poorly governed AI can concentrate power within technical units or external vendors, potentially obscuring the very transparency and accountability that devolved governance aims to provide. By developing a model internal policy using the Kiambu County Assembly as a primary case study, the project provides a scalable, evidence-based blueprint that allows other counties to adapt AI in a way that strengthens, rather than substitutes, democratic judgment.

This Capstone project serves as a strategic bridge between national-level policy initiatives and grassroots legislative functions. It aligns county-level governance with broader African governance priorities and the calls from bodies like the Pan-African Parliament for legislatures to lead in human-rights-focused AI oversight. Ultimately, its significance is found in its proactive stance; it prevents county assemblies from either falling behind or adopting technology in a reckless manner, ensuring that AI becomes a tool for inclusive public participation and high-quality legislative scrutiny.

*The Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy Fellowship: Foundations and Governance for Policy Makers is an initiative of the East African artificial intelligence (AI) Policy Hub, designed to strengthen policy capacity on AI governance across the public sector. To date, the Fellowship has successfully equipped two cohorts of policymakers and regulators with the knowledge and tools required to engage with AI policy and governance challenges.*



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