

McGill Law Journal accessible summary:

Reclaiming human freedom in an age of rising authoritarianism and artificial intelligence

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Topic and importance

Authoritarianism has been on the rise alongside the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI), both of which threaten human freedom and democracy. Authoritarian political systems concentrate power in leaders who weaken legal checks and balances, suppress dissent, and encourage public deference. AI systems, meanwhile, are increasingly used in medicine, employment, policing, education, and governance, often without transparency or meaningful human oversight. To preserve and strengthen human judgment, participation, and agency, we must pay attention to the risks of passivity and deference encouraged by AI in this new age of autocracy.

Main arguments

Contemporary authoritarian movements weaken democratic institutions by attacking the rule of law, courts, universities, journalism, and other independent sources of authority, fostering obedience and passivity rather than active citizenship. Appeals to authoritarianism cultivate conspiratorial thinking, mental inflexibility, and deference to strong leaders, patterns that have historically enabled censorship, propaganda, and widespread social apathy. At the same time, powerful generative AI technologies, largely developed by global corporations, increasingly shape democratic processes and everyday decision-making. These systems often encourage human deference by offering fast, confident, and human-like responses that invite users to outsource memory, reasoning, and judgment. AI systems also tend to privilege their own generated outputs, suppress ambiguity, and prioritize user satisfaction, sometimes favoring agreeable or sycophantic responses over accuracy. Together, authoritarian governance and prevailing AI practices amplify social distrust and create conditions that make people more likely to accept unaccountable authority, whether political or technological.

Conclusion and additional considerations

Human freedom cannot be preserved through passivity or technological optimism alone and must instead be actively reclaimed. Increasing dependence on corporate AI systems risks weakening critical thinking, judgment, and resistance to unjust authority, particularly in societies already experiencing democratic backsliding. While AI offers genuine benefits, especially in fields such as medicine and scientific research, its growing role in areas affecting rights and democratic participation raises urgent legal and ethical concerns. Institutional safeguards, legal

regulation, and collective action are necessary to ensure that AI systems enhance rather than replace human agency. Future research should examine how AI can be designed and governed to support democratic participation and human judgment. Individually and collectively, we must reduce our dependence on AI and be aware of its effects on our capacity for critical thinking and our ability to participate meaningfully in civic life.