The Map Has No Node for Legitimacy

A response to Tim Clancy and Asmeret Bier Naugle’s qualitative model of AI sovereignty — and why some of us are building for the scenarios it leaves out

John G. Stroh · My Digital Sovereignty Ltd. · 12 slides with presenter notes

What the model gets right

- Maps national power in agentic AI as a contest over five accumulable growth levers
- Accelerators, datasets, skilled workforce, electricity, water — each with its own limits to growth
- Adversary action shows up as degradation of availability across multiple levers at once
- Unifies export controls, talent restrictions, and supply-chain attacks as one phenomenon
- A true account of how great powers are actually behaving

Its definition is capacity, not legitimacy

- The paper defines AI sovereignty as the extent to which a nation independently controls its AI
- So every one of the five levers is a quantity of capacity a state accumulates or loses
- Nowhere is there a term for legitimacy, or for the authority of the people whose data trains and steers the system
- These are not missing numbers the model could add later — they are not in its vocabulary at all
- A different theory of what sovereignty means, not a missing box

Two concepts of sovereignty

- The disagreement is old — it predates AI by centuries
- Effective control (de facto): the capacity to act without being overridden
- Rightful authority (de jure): the standing to make decisions others are bound to recognise
- A junta has control without authority; a government-in-exile has authority without control
- The Westphalian, territorial, capacity-backed default fits data poorly — and peoples whose authority was never territorial worse
- Māori data sovereignty is rangatiratanga — a de jure claim grounded in relationship and whakapapa, holding whether or not capacity matches it
- The governance form that fits is polycentric — many co-equal authorities over a shared resource, in Ostrom's sense

The test: where do these claims live?

- Ask where the European Union’s domestic AI sovereignty measures live on the model
- Ask where Māori data sovereignty lives — rangatiratanga, authority and control over data
- Ask where any indigenous governance claim lives
- There is no lever for them: not adversary degradation, not capacity accumulation
- The EU’s June 2026 technological-sovereignty package is exactly such an instrument a capacity model cannot score

The capacity trap

- On its own axes the contest is unwinnable for any actor without national-scale capital
- A small nation will never accumulate competitive zettaFLOPS or win the water-and-electricity attrition game
- If sovereignty is capacity across five levers, most of the world is permanently dependent
- The only rational move left is to pick a patron and accept it
- Yew and colleagues: counting sovereignty in units of capacity lets providers sell “sovereign” AI and define the term in the units they sell

Sovereignty as rightful authority

- The older definition: rightful authority over a domain — recognised standing to make binding decisions within it
- A community with modest compute but genuine authority over its own data may be sovereign in a way no lever count captures
- This is the definition the model has no lever for
- It does not require winning the capacity race

What the Village runs today

- Every record carries per-record provenance: a cryptographic origin hash + an append-only, tamper-evident signed proof chain
- A community body — iwi, marae, club, whānau — holds real, co-equal authority over how the model behaves on its data
- It writes and edits its own governance rules, layered over a platform safety floor it can raise but cannot be forced below
- Through its designated cultural authority it marks content tapu or restricted → the model must refuse or escalate, not answer on its own
- Authorities (platform, iwi, community trust) are co-equal peers, each publishing rules + steering, each able to withdraw them at any moment
- Not a roadmap item: deployed, composed at inference, auditable end to end

Honest substrate separation

- The Village governs the layer it can actually govern — and only that
- The substrate beneath — frontier model weights, accelerators, the compute itself — sits inside the foreign-controlled levers the model maps
- The models run are open weights authored outside our jurisdiction, served locally on EU- and NZ-hosted GPUs
- The dependency is not pretended away
- Governance sovereignty and substrate sovereignty are separable; the former is built and running today for actors who will never hold the latter

The third option

- The strategic-competition frame offers small nations a binary: align with American big-tech AI or Chinese big-tech AI
- Either way, accept the dependency
- But if sovereignty is rightful authority rather than raw capacity, a third path opens
- Not by matching their levers, which is hopeless — by refusing their definition of the contest
- The actors the model’s loops exclude are not powerless; they are being measured on the wrong axis

The friendly amendment

- Less a rebuttal than a request to widen the model
- Add the nodes the realist frame leaves out: legitimacy, data-subject authority, the standing of the governed to steer
- Then a second set of loops appears — a community gains sovereignty without gaining a single accelerator
- And an adversary’s compute advantage does not automatically erode another actor’s rightful authority over its own domain
- Read the full paper: The Map Has No Node for Legitimacy — /papers/map-has-no-node-for-legitimacy.html

The Map Has No Node for Legitimacy

A response to Clancy and Naugle's model of AI sovereignty as national power — sovereignty as rightful authority is a separable layer, and it is the layer the Village platform and Tractatus framework run at today.