

Sovereignty Without Dominance

Rightful authority at human scale, in the age of AI

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Research: agenticgovernance.digital

Full essay with sources: agenticgovernance.digital/papers/sovereignty-without-dominance.html

The argument everyone is having

The race, as run, has no winner — and Graylin is right about that.

- For two years AI has been framed as a race: pick the American stack or the Chinese stack.
- Alvin Wang Graylin (with Paul Triolo): *"there will not and cannot be any long-term winners... on its current path."*
- *"adoption beats invention. Distribution beats dominance."*
- His remedy: a *"CERN for AI,"* not a *"Manhattan Project for AI."*
- **Notice the word he attacks: dominance — not sovereignty.**
- **The race is real and intensifying** — Iran's data-centre strikes (Mar 2026), the EU sovereignty package (Jun 2026), the Mythos/Fable cut-off. This runs in a different lane: *what should be*, complementary not contrary.

→ Graylin & Triolo, [MIT Technology Review](#) (2025); [Beyond Rivalry](#) (2025)

The gaze we have not learned to turn

Scrutinise the US as evenly as we scrutinise China — with respect, not hostility.

- OECD audiences are trained to mistrust the Chinese state's reach — the National Intelligence Law is real.
- We are **not** trained to apply the same lens to the US. Right now the symmetry deserves stating.
- **CLOUD Act (2018)**: US providers must disclose data *"regardless of whether... stored in the U.S. or on foreign soil."*
- **FISA §702**: warrantless surveillance of non-US persons abroad via US providers (up for renewal April 2026).
- The EU called the CLOUD Act *"a law in possible conflict with the GDPR"*; Germany warned off US cloud for sensitive data.

→ [CLOUD Act](#) · [FISA §702](#)

Sovereignty and legitimacy — two measures, not one word

Two axes, not one contested word.

- **Sovereignty** (strictly) — control over your own domain, to the exclusion of others.
- **Legitimacy** — the rightful authority you hold in the eyes of the people you affect.
- A continuum the "who's winning" question flattens. Brookings/CEPS (2026): full-stack national sovereignty is *"structurally infeasible for almost any country."*
- The race reads only **sovereignty-as-capacity** at national scale (Huang: *"every country needs to own the production of their own intelligence"*) — which most will never hold.
- What most of the world *can* hold: **legitimacy + a bounded data sovereignty.**

→ [Brookings/CEPS, *Is AI Sovereignty Possible?* \(2026\)](#) · Huang/NVIDIA, the national pole

What the Village holds

The sovereignty worth wanting is a community's control over the data and systems that act on it, exercised with legitimacy — held at human scale, federated, never surrendered.

A coordinate on the map — high legitimacy, modestly but genuinely sovereign over its own domain. Two things, **co-equal**, as **co-governance**:

- **Legitimacy** — the community's rightful standing to decide what its AI may do, must refuse, and who answers for it.
- **Data sovereignty** — control over the one domain it can hold: its data and the models that act on it (*rangatiratanga* over data).

Not dominance over anyone — **legitimacy plus the capacity to say no**. It scales by **federating outward**, not racing upward. *A federated mesh has no node that must win.*

This is old, not invented

Four traditions, no shared lineage, one conclusion.

- **Elinor Ostrom** (Nobel, 2009): communities *can* self-govern commons — a third way past privatise-or-nationalise; eight design principles, including **nested enterprises** (federation).
- **Subsidiarity**: authority at the lowest competent level — *Quadragesimo Anno* §79 (1931); EU law.
- **Simone Weil**: obligations come before rights; rootedness is a basic human need.
- **Te ao Māori**: *rangatiratanga* — relational authority; Māori data sovereignty grounded in **Te Tiriti**.

→ [Ostrom](#) · [Quadragesimo Anno §79](#) · [Weil](#) · [Te Mana Raraunga](#)

The architecture — an immutable constitutional layer

"Never surrendered" must be a property of the system, not a promise.

1. **Immutable floor** — inviolable values enforced *in architecture, not policy*: human-in-the-loop on certain decisions; restricted content forces refusal/escalation; **te Tiriti as a constitutional commitment, not a clause**. *No single party — operator, community, or model — can override or stealth-erode it.*
2. **Community rules** above the floor — governance precedes infrastructure.
3. **Co-equal authorities** — each publishes rules and can withdraw them at any moment.

The immutability is the structural answer to values-creep: values that can't be quietly overridden can't be quietly normalised away.

Why now — normalisation, and a closing window

Arendt: great harm arrives banal — by *"a curious, quite authentic inability to think."* Extractive AI normalises by **habituation, not decision**; guardrails erode by familiarity. The immutable floor keeps core values out of reach of that drift.

But the timing cuts both ways:

- The same exponential capability that speeds the drift makes the alternative **cheap to build**.
- *The research behind this essay was done by a swarm — 100+ sub-agents in one run, minutes not days, twice over.*
- A small, principled team can now stand up a **sovereign, multi-region system** on situated small models (Llama, Qwen), outside any single state's reach, in **months**.

A live exhibit — and an honest admission

It happened while this was being written, at my own expense.

- **12 June 2026:** a US export-control directive suspended Fable 5 + Mythos 5 for *"any foreign national, whether inside or outside the United States."*
- The most capable model — withdrawn overnight from every foreign national, by an order they had no part in.
- Anthropic **disagreed publicly** and is working to restore access. *The company is not the villain. There is no villain. There is only the structure.*
- **Admission:** this essay was drafted with US models on US infrastructure — the tool arguing for a sovereign stack is itself subject to the dominance logic. *The argument, demonstrated — not hidden.*

→ Anthropic, [Statement on the directive to suspend Fable 5 & Mythos 5](#) (12 Jun 2026)

The aspiration — and the ask of the reader

Every community able to run AI it governs, and own the data it creates — honouring te Tiriti and other co-equal principles in an immutable constitutional layer no one can quietly override.

- Not every community winning the capacity race — almost none will.
- Every community holding the authority it is **entitled to** — at human scale, federated, never surrendered.
- A quiet act of **non-alignment**: owing allegiance to no patron, because it doesn't play the patrons' game.

Before asking whose AI to build on, ask what authority you are entitled to hold yourself — and then hold it.

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