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Data Sovereignty, Platform Regulation, and Sustainable Digital Development: A Comparative Legal Study of the European Union and India

Clara Hoffmann[1]

Clara Hoffmann

Faculty of Law
University of Vienna
Email: clara.hoffmann@univie.ac.at

***Corresponding Author:** clara.hoffmann@univie.ac.at

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how data sovereignty and platform regulation shape institutional governance, legal accountability, and sustainable digital development through a comparative analysis of the European Union and India. It argues that contemporary digital regulation increasingly operates as a constitutional and developmental governance project in which legal systems structure the relationship between data markets, public authority, platform power, citizen rights, and socio-economic transformation. The European Union represents a rights-based and market-constitutional model built around data protection, competition governance, platform accountability, and digital sovereignty. India represents a developmental and state-capacity-oriented model that links digital identity, data governance, platform regulation, financial inclusion, and public service delivery. Using comparative legal analysis, institutional governance theory, and regulatory process tracing, the article analyzes the GDPR, Digital Services Act, Digital Markets Act, Data Act, India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023, Aadhaar-related jurisprudence, and digital public infrastructure governance. The findings indicate that the EU emphasizes procedural accountability and regulatory constraint, while India prioritizes scalable digital inclusion and administrative transformation. However, both

systems reveal that data governance affects not only privacy and innovation but also institutional legitimacy, welfare delivery, competition, and sustainable development. The article contributes to comparative legal scholarship by developing theoretical propositions on data constitutionalism, institutional interoperability, and sustainable digital governance.

Keywords
data sovereignty; platform regulation; digital constitutionalism; India; European Union; data protection law; digital public infrastructure; competition law; sustainable development; comparative legal governance

INTRODUCTION

Digital governance has become one of the defining legal transformations of the twenty-first century. Data infrastructures now structure public administration, financial systems, welfare delivery, platform markets, border control, electoral communication, health governance, and urban management. As governments and private platforms increasingly rely on automated systems, cloud infrastructures, identity databases, and algorithmic decision-making, law is required not merely to regulate discrete technologies but to organize the constitutional conditions of digital society. The issue is no longer whether states should regulate data and platforms, but how legal systems can design institutions capable of protecting rights, enabling innovation, disciplining market power, and supporting sustainable socio-economic development.

The global legal environment has moved rapidly toward more comprehensive digital regulation. The European Union's Data Act entered into force on 11 January 2024 and became applicable from 12 September 2025, adding to the broader EU digital regulatory architecture that includes the GDPR, Digital Services Act, Digital Markets Act, and AI Act. The United Nations Global Digital Compact has also framed digital cooperation and AI governance as matters of international law, development, and human rights. The World Bank's GovTech Maturity Index measures public-sector digital transformation through indicators concerning core government systems, online public services, citizen engagement, legal frameworks, institutional capacity, skills, and innovation policy. These developments indicate that digital regulation is now directly connected to governance quality, public trust, administrative capacity, and development outcomes.

This article compares the European Union and India because they represent two major but distinct models of digital legal transformation. The European Union has constructed a rights-centered regulatory order that constitutionalizes data protection, procedural accountability, platform responsibility, and competition governance. Its legal architecture aims to discipline private digital power while creating a harmonized internal digital market. India, by contrast, has developed a state-enabled developmental model organized around digital public infrastructure, identity systems, payment platforms, welfare delivery, and data governance. India's regulatory trajectory is shaped by constitutional privacy jurisprudence, the Aadhaar identity system, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023, competition concerns involving digital platforms, and the state's ambition to use digital infrastructure for inclusion and administrative

modernization.

The academic and policy problem is that existing legal scholarship often treats data protection, platform regulation, competition law, and digital public infrastructure as separate domains. This fragmentation obscures the fact that digital governance operates through institutional interdependence. Data protection law affects platform markets; platform regulation affects democratic communication; digital identity affects welfare access; competition law affects innovation ecosystems; and public data infrastructures affect state capacity. A comparative legal framework is therefore required to explain how regulatory design shapes institutional implementation and socio-economic outcomes.

Previous scholarship has made important contributions. Zuboff (2019) conceptualizes data extraction as a structural feature of surveillance capitalism. Bradford (2020) explains how EU regulatory power travels globally through market access and legal diffusion. Kuner et al. (2020) analyze the GDPR as a major legal framework for transnational data governance. Cohen (2019) argues that informational capitalism reconfigures legal subjectivity and institutional power. Yeung (2021) critically interrogates algorithmic regulation and its implications for accountability. Bhandari and Sane (2021) examine India's data governance challenges through constitutional and institutional lenses. Chander (2023) emphasizes the geopolitical fragmentation of digital trade and data flows. Sen (2022) links digital public infrastructure to welfare access and administrative capability. While these studies are valuable, they often do not fully explain the causal relationship between legal architecture, institutional coordination, regulatory enforcement, and sustainable development.

This article identifies five research gaps. First, there is a theoretical gap in connecting data sovereignty with digital constitutionalism and sustainable development. Second, there is an empirical gap concerning how data governance regimes operate through institutions rather than through statutes alone. Third, there is a comparative legal gap in analyzing the EU and India as alternative regulatory models rather than as isolated jurisdictions. Fourth, there is a regulatory governance gap concerning how platform regulation, competition policy, and data protection interact. Fifth, there is a sustainability gap because digital regulation is rarely analyzed as a legal condition for inclusive development, welfare delivery, economic resilience, and democratic legitimacy.

The novelty of this article lies in its integrated legal-governance approach. It argues that data sovereignty should not be understood merely as territorial control over data, nor platform regulation merely as content moderation or market discipline. Instead, both are components of a broader digital constitutional order that determines how citizens, markets, and public institutions relate to one another. The article develops a causal framework in which data governance shapes institutional coordination; institutional coordination shapes regulatory enforcement; regulatory enforcement shapes platform accountability; and platform accountability shapes socio-economic resilience and sustainable development.

The central argument is that the European Union and India represent two different but increasingly convergent responses to the same structural problem: how to govern digital power in a way that supports

rights, innovation, institutional legitimacy, and development. The EU emphasizes constraint, accountability, and market constitutionalism. India emphasizes scale, inclusion, and administrative transformation. Each model has strengths and vulnerabilities. The EU risks regulatory complexity and compliance burdens; India risks institutional opacity and uneven rights protection. The comparative lesson is that sustainable digital development requires neither deregulated innovation nor purely centralized digital administration, but legally accountable institutional interoperability.

Accordingly, this article aims to analyze how data sovereignty and platform regulation in the European Union and India shape institutional implementation, governance accountability, and sustainable socio-economic development outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative legal governance methodology combining doctrinal legal analysis, comparative institutional analysis, regulatory process tracing, and socio-legal interpretation. The research design is aligned with digital constitutionalism and regulatory governance theory, enabling the article to examine how legal norms structure institutional authority, platform power, market behavior, citizen rights, and development outcomes. The European Union and India were selected because both are large democratic legal orders seeking to regulate digital power, yet they differ substantially in constitutional structure, administrative capacity, market organization, regulatory philosophy, and development priorities. The comparative variables include data protection principles, platform accountability obligations, competition governance, digital public infrastructure, institutional enforcement capacity, judicial review, administrative coordination, and socio-economic inclusion. Primary legal materials include the GDPR, Digital Services Act, Digital Markets Act, Data Act, EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, India's Constitution, the Supreme Court of India's privacy and Aadhaar jurisprudence, the Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023, competition law materials, government digital policy documents, and institutional reports from the European Commission, OECD, World Bank, United Nations, and Indian public authorities.

The analysis applies qualitative comparative interpretation and institutional process tracing to identify how legal frameworks move from formal rules to governance outcomes. Doctrinal interpretation is triangulated with governance indicators, public policy reports, regulatory agency documents, and scholarly literature to enhance reliability. The study does not rely on interview data and therefore does not fabricate empirical testimony. Validation is pursued through cross-source consistency, comparison between statutory design and institutional implementation, and assessment of policy outcomes against legal objectives. Ethical considerations concern accurate legal representation, avoidance of unsupported claims, and careful distinction between formal law and governance practice. The principal limitation is that digital regulation evolves rapidly, and both jurisdictions continue to revise institutional arrangements. Nevertheless, the comparative framework offers a robust basis for analyzing how digital legal systems shape institutional legitimacy, market governance, and sustainable development.

Findings and Discussion

1. Data Constitutionalism and Divergent Legal Foundations

The comparison reveals that the European Union and India both constitutionalize data governance, but they do so through different institutional logics. The EU model begins from fundamental rights, especially privacy, data protection, human dignity, equality, and democratic accountability. The GDPR institutionalizes data protection as a rights-based regulatory framework, while the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights gives privacy and data protection constitutional status. The Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act extend this constitutional logic into platform governance and competition regulation.

India's model emerged through constitutional adjudication and developmental governance. The Supreme Court of India's recognition of privacy as a constitutional right in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* transformed the normative basis of Indian data governance. However, India's digital governance is also shaped by Aadhaar, Unified Payments Interface, welfare databases, and digital public infrastructure. This creates a hybrid model in which constitutional privacy exists alongside large-scale state-enabled data systems.

The EU approach constrains both public and private digital power through formal regulatory obligations. India's approach seeks to use data infrastructure to expand public service delivery, financial inclusion, and administrative reach. The doctrinal difference is therefore not simply between strong and weak privacy protection. It is between a regulatory-constitutional model and a developmental-constitutional model.

This finding modifies existing literature on digital constitutionalism. While scholars often associate digital constitutionalism with rights protection, the Indian case shows that constitutional digital governance may also operate through developmental state capacity. However, the absence of strong procedural safeguards can produce risks of exclusion, surveillance, and administrative opacity.

2. Platform Regulation, Competition, and Market Governance

Platform regulation represents a second major area of divergence. The European Union has developed a sophisticated regulatory architecture addressing illegal content, systemic platform risks, market gatekeeping, algorithmic transparency, and data access. The Digital Services Act imposes due diligence obligations on platforms, while the Digital Markets Act targets gatekeeper power in digital markets. The EU therefore treats platform governance as both a rights issue and a competition issue.

India's platform regulation has developed through information technology rules, intermediary liability frameworks, competition law enforcement, and sectoral digital policy. Indian regulation places substantial emphasis on state authority over online platforms, including content takedown obligations, traceability demands in certain contexts, and compliance mechanisms for intermediaries. At the same time, India has become increasingly concerned with platform dominance in digital advertising, app stores, e-commerce, and payment ecosystems.

The cross-case comparison shows that the EU's platform governance model is more juridified and

procedurally detailed, while India's model is more administratively flexible and state-directed. The EU emphasizes systemic risk assessment and independent oversight. India emphasizes responsiveness to public order, sovereignty, and user protection concerns. Both systems attempt to discipline platform power, but they define the primary risk differently. The EU sees concentrated private power as a threat to rights and market fairness. India sees platform power as a threat to sovereignty, public order, competition, and domestic developmental autonomy.

Theoretical interpretation suggests that platform regulation is no longer a sectoral issue. It is a form of constitutional market governance. Platforms shape speech, commerce, labor, finance, public opinion, and access to services. Legal systems therefore regulate platforms not only to correct market failure but to preserve institutional legitimacy and socio-economic fairness.

3. Institutional Coordination and Implementation Capacity

The central implementation challenge in both jurisdictions is institutional coordination. The EU operates through multi-level governance involving the European Commission, national data protection authorities, competition authorities, digital service coordinators, courts, and sectoral regulators. This structure provides checks and balances but also generates complexity. Regulatory fragmentation may delay enforcement, create inconsistent interpretation, and increase compliance burdens.

India's institutional structure is more centralized in some areas but fragmented in others. Digital identity, payments, data protection, cybersecurity, competition, and platform governance are managed by different institutions with overlapping mandates. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 establishes a Data Protection Board, but its practical independence, enforcement capacity, and relationship with other regulators remain crucial for future governance outcomes.

The comparison reveals that formal legal enactment is insufficient without institutional interoperability. Digital governance requires coordination among privacy regulators, competition authorities, cybersecurity agencies, consumer protection institutions, courts, and public-sector technology bodies. The World Bank's GovTech framework explicitly treats legal institutions, digital skills, innovation policy, shared infrastructure, and citizen engagement as components of public-sector digital maturity.

Table 1. Analytical Matrix of Comparative Legal and Governance Development

Variable	Case 1: European Union	Case 2: India	Empirical Evidence	Analytical Interpretation
Constitutional foundation	Rights-based digital constitutionalism	Developmental constitutionalism with privacy recognition	EU Charter, GDPR, *Puttaswamy* judgment	Both constitutionalize data, but through different legitimacy models
Data governance model	Comprehensive, rights-centered,	Emerging data protection	GDPR, Data Act, DPDP Act	EU prioritizes constraint;

	compliance-heavy	with state-led digital infrastructure	2023	India prioritizes scalable governance
Platform regulation	DSA/DMA systemic risk and gatekeeper regulation	Intermediary rules, competition enforcement, sovereignty concerns	EU platform laws; Indian IT rules and competition proceedings	Platform governance reflects different risk conceptions
Institutional coordination	Multi-level supranational and national enforcement	Mixed centralized and fragmented institutional architecture	EU Commission, DPAs, Indian Data Protection Board	Implementation depends on regulatory interoperability
Public-sector digitalization	Regulated digital market and public administration modernization	Digital public infrastructure for welfare, identity, and payments	EU digital strategy; Aadhaar and UPI systems	India links digital law more directly to inclusion and state capacity
Economic governance	Market harmonization and competition discipline	Inclusion, platform competition, domestic digital economy	DMA, Indian digital economy policy	Both use law to structure digital capitalism
Sustainability implication	Rights-resilient digital market governance	Scale-driven inclusion with accountability risks	OECD, World Bank, UN digital governance reports	Sustainable development requires both inclusion and rights safeguards

The matrix indicates that regulatory performance depends on the relationship between legal design and institutional capacity. The EU has dense legal rules but faces coordination complexity. India has strong digital implementation capacity in public infrastructure but faces concerns regarding procedural accountability and institutional independence. Sustainable digital governance therefore requires a balance between enforceable rights, administrative capability, and interoperable institutions.

4. Digital Public Infrastructure and Sustainable Development Outcomes

India's most distinctive contribution to global digital governance lies in digital public infrastructure. Aadhaar, UPI, DigiLocker, and other systems have enabled large-scale identity verification, financial transactions, welfare distribution, and administrative integration. These infrastructures demonstrate how digital systems can support inclusion, reduce transaction costs, and expand access to public services.

However, digital public infrastructure also creates legal risks. Identity-linked welfare systems may generate exclusion when authentication fails. Centralized data systems may increase surveillance capacity. Public-private data-sharing arrangements may weaken accountability if not regulated through clear legal safeguards. The Indian case therefore shows that digital inclusion must be accompanied by due process, contestability, data minimization, and effective remedies.

The EU does not possess an equivalent single national digital public infrastructure because it is a supranational legal order composed of member states. However, it promotes interoperable digital identity, data spaces, and public-sector digital transformation through regulatory harmonization. The EU model is slower but more rights-protective. India's model is faster and more scalable but institutionally more vulnerable if safeguards are weak.

The sustainability implications are significant. Digital public infrastructure can advance Sustainable Development Goals by improving financial inclusion, welfare targeting, health access, and administrative efficiency. Yet sustainability is not only about scale. It also requires legal resilience, institutional trust, non-discrimination, and rights-compatible governance.

5. Data Sovereignty, Global Governance, and Regulatory Diffusion

Both the European Union and India increasingly frame data governance in terms of sovereignty. For the EU, digital sovereignty concerns reducing dependence on external technological infrastructures, strengthening European regulatory autonomy, and creating trusted data markets. The Data Act and data spaces strategy seek to increase access, interoperability, and fairness in data use.

For India, data sovereignty is closely connected to developmental autonomy, national security, and domestic innovation. India seeks to protect citizen data while enabling public and private digital innovation. This creates tension between open digital trade, localization pressures, state access, and privacy protection.

The United Nations Global Digital Compact reflects growing international recognition that digital governance must be grounded in human rights, cooperation, AI governance, and development inclusion. This matters because data governance is increasingly transnational. Cloud systems, AI models, platform markets, and digital trade cannot be governed entirely within national borders.

The comparison suggests that future digital governance will be shaped by regulatory pluralism. The EU will continue to influence global rules through market-based regulatory diffusion. India will influence global debates through digital public infrastructure and development-oriented data governance. The challenge is to avoid regulatory fragmentation while preserving legal diversity and developmental autonomy.

Theoretical Propositions

Proposition 1: Data sovereignty becomes sustainable only when it is linked to rights, institutional accountability, and development capacity.

Data sovereignty cannot be reduced to territorial data control. It becomes legally meaningful when it protects citizens, structures platform power, enables public-interest innovation, and strengthens institutional legitimacy.

Proposition 2: Platform regulation functions as constitutional market governance.

Digital platforms do not merely participate in markets; they organize speech, commerce, identity, labor, and public access. Platform regulation therefore performs constitutional functions by structuring private power and protecting public values.

Proposition 3: Institutional interoperability mediates the relationship between digital law and sustainable development.

Legal rules produce development outcomes only when regulators, courts, public agencies, and digital infrastructure institutions coordinate effectively.

Proposition 4: Digital public infrastructure requires procedural constitutional safeguards.

Scalable digital systems can advance inclusion, but without transparency, remedies, proportionality, and non-discrimination safeguards, they may reproduce exclusion and surveillance.

CONCLUSION

This article has analyzed how data sovereignty and platform regulation in the European Union and India shape institutional implementation, governance accountability, and sustainable socio-economic development. The central finding is that digital regulation is no longer a specialized legal field concerned only with privacy or technology. It has become a foundational governance structure through which states organize markets, public administration, citizen rights, and development strategies.

The European Union represents a rights-based and market-constitutional model. Its strengths lie in procedural accountability, regulatory sophistication, competition discipline, and fundamental rights protection. Its weaknesses lie in institutional complexity, compliance burdens, and uneven implementation across member states. India represents a developmental and infrastructure-oriented model. Its strengths lie in scale, inclusion, digital public infrastructure, and administrative innovation. Its weaknesses lie in risks of opacity, exclusion, institutional dependence, and incomplete procedural safeguards.

The theoretical contribution of this article is to conceptualize data governance as digital constitutional development. The empirical contribution lies in showing how two major democratic legal systems construct different pathways from legal design to governance outcomes. The policy implication is that sustainable digital development requires integration among data protection, platform regulation, competition law, public-sector digital infrastructure, and constitutional accountability.

Future research should examine how courts interpret emerging digital rights, how regulators coordinate across sectors, how digital public infrastructure affects marginalized communities, and how global digital governance frameworks influence domestic regulatory reform. Ultimately, sustainable digital governance depends on the capacity of legal systems to combine innovation with accountability, sovereignty with openness, and administrative scale with constitutional restraint.

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