Political Automation

An Introduction to AI in Government
and its Impact on Citizens

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Let us start with a wide-angle anthropological view:

1. AI has changed the nature of governance
2. *Political machines* have replaced human bureaucrats
3. These machines are not confined to government offices but are everywhere

Some are in obvious places

Some in less obvious places

Most you carry with you

Political machines depend on three things:

01

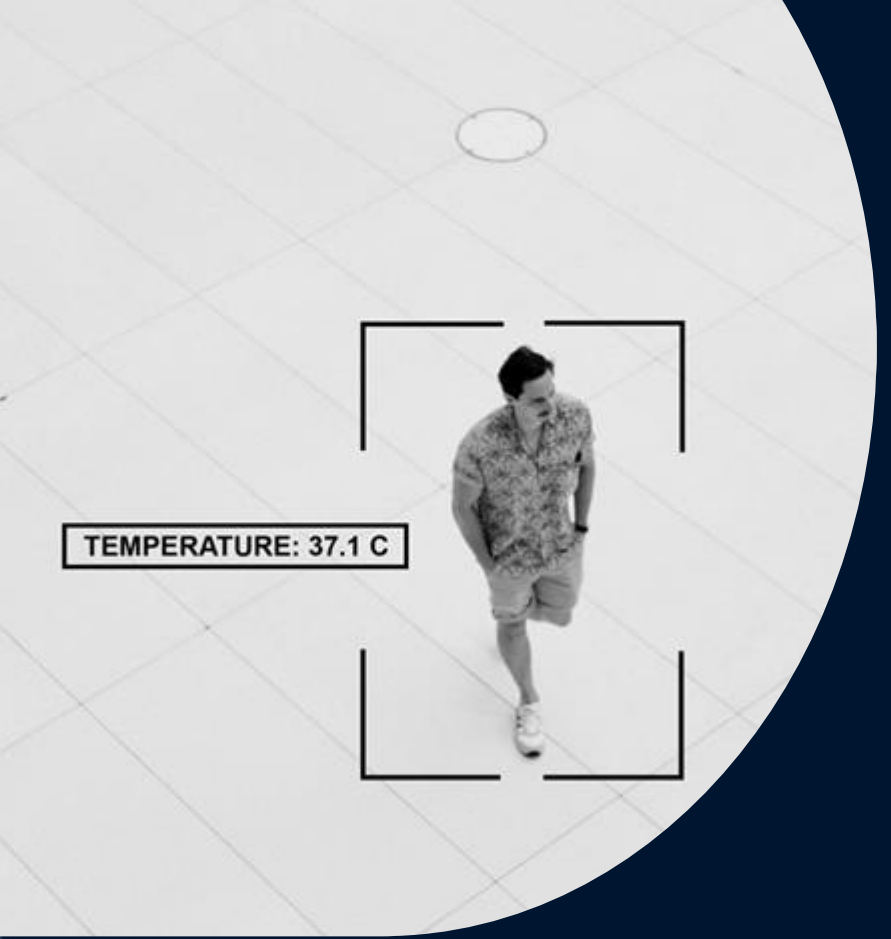
Informatized Bodies

02

Mechanics of Expression

03

Digitized Biographies



Informatized physical bodies

Mechanics of Human Expression

Digitized Social Biographies

3 years fieldwork with digital rights groups

- California: Oakland Privacy and NorCal Resist
- Europe: Access Now and European Digital Rights
- Africa: African Law and Technology Institute and Penplusbytes
- India: Digital Futures Lab and Centre for Internet and Society
- Kenya: Africa Check and Safe Online Women

Some results from interviews that are similar across geographies:

People are unevenly aware of deployment of political machines

People are unevenly impacted (citizens vs irregular border-crossers)

Digital identities being created without consent (psychologically less autonomous)

Few avenues for governance (often resort to legal whack amole)

Case Study #ProtectNotSurveil

AI tools have disproportionate impact on already marginalized communities

Reliance on Problematic Origin Data	Embedding of Cultural Stereotypes	Inaccurate Automatic Risk Assessment
• Interoperability of data streams across borders • Includes data collected in locations lacking human rights frameworks	• Pattern of over-targeting based on deductive logics • Criminalization of certain nationalities, professions, and education types	• Decisions based on poor predictive performance • Leads to the exclusion of people who are legally entitled to rights

“Automation Fatigue” sets in

UNINTENTIONAL

- Unreasonable burden of proof on the individual
- Guilty until proven innocent
- Feeling of helplessness around machines’ “authority”

INTENTIONAL

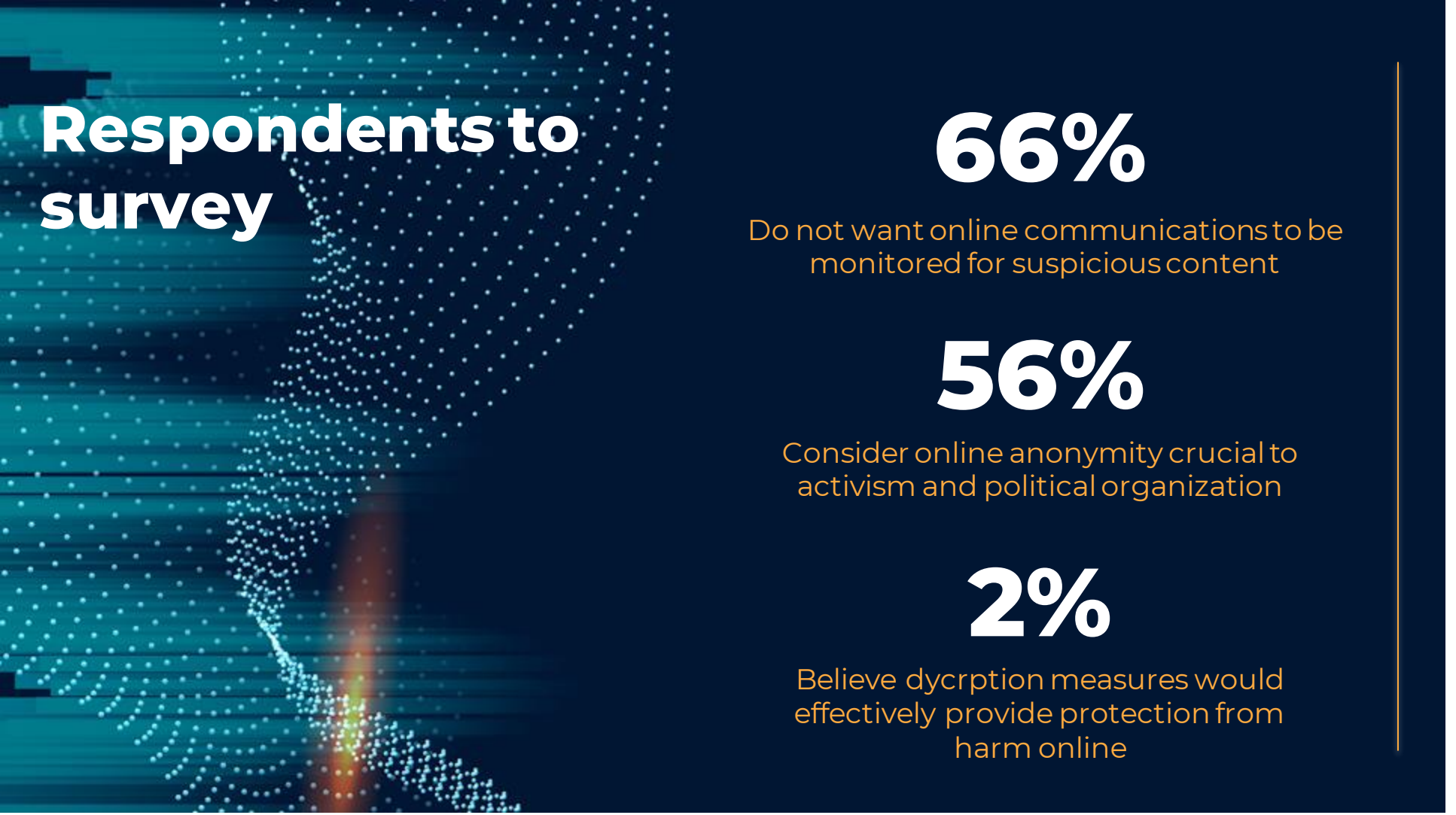
- Deliberate complexification of how decisions are made
- Use of technical jargon to obscure reality
- Private vendors seek to protect proprietary models

Case Study:

Decryption for Security

Private online communications are automatically monitored

Risk assessed across variety of vectors



Respondents to survey

66%

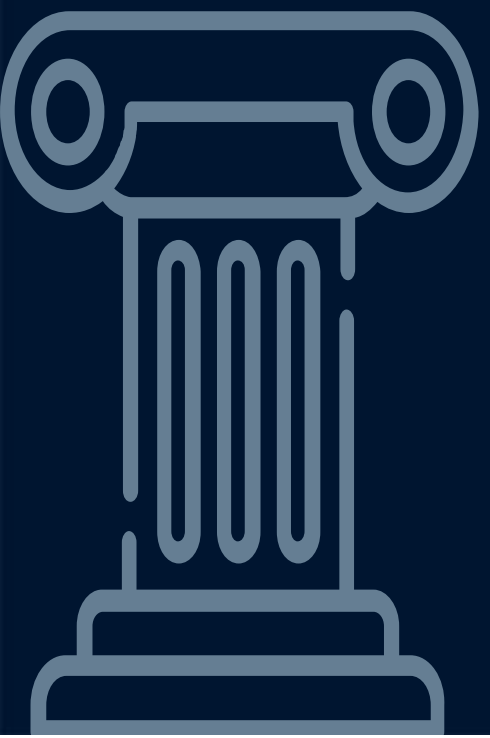
Do not want online communications to be monitored for suspicious content

56%

Consider online anonymity crucial to activism and political organization

2%

Believe dycrption measures would effectively provide protection from harm online



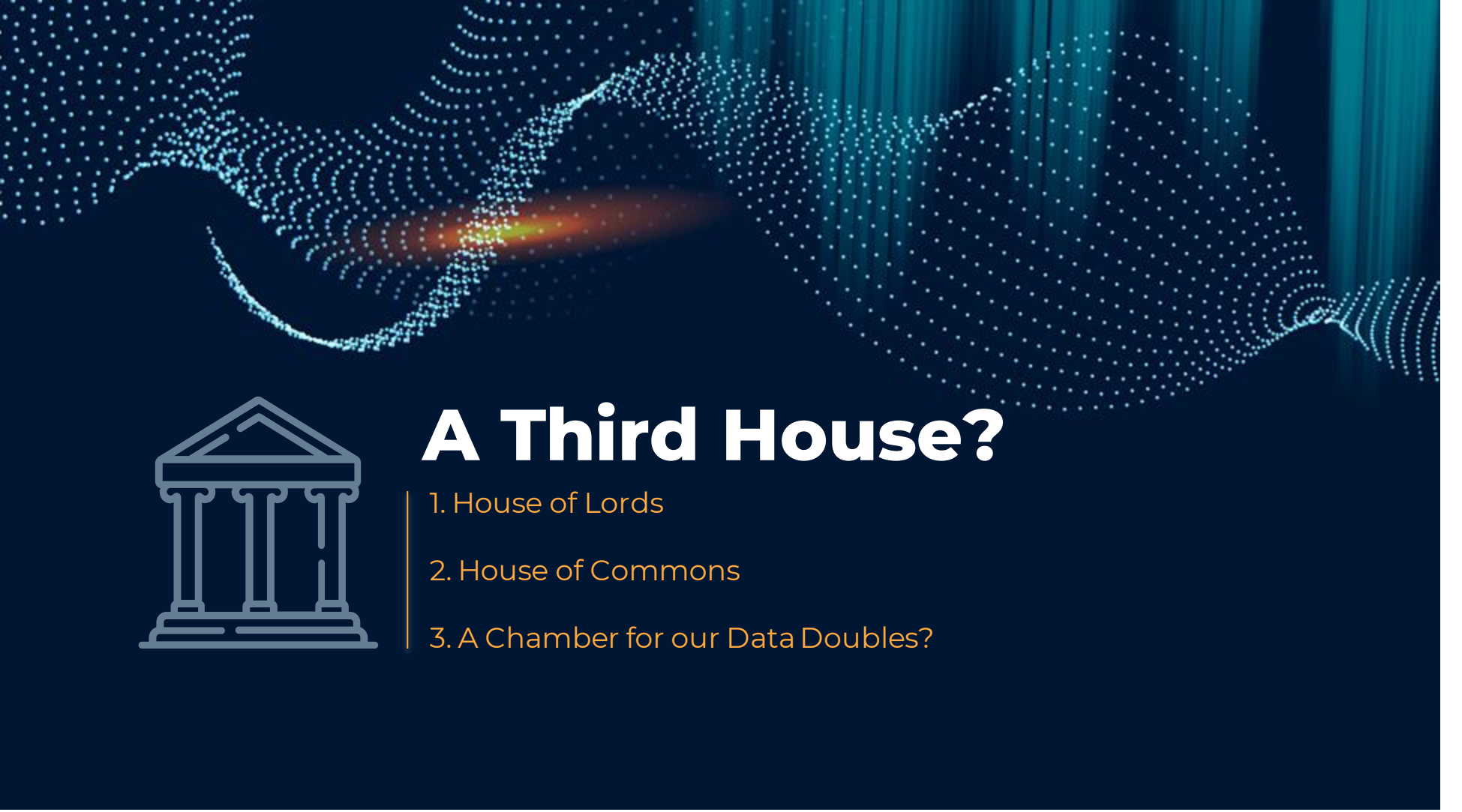
Across all geographies, we find that political machines:

Often tested or deployed on more vulnerable populations, before being deployed on wider sections

Citizens have few tools to stop the “mission creep”. Theory:

There seems to be an incompatibility between institutions created to govern human bureaucrats and institutions needed to govern political machines

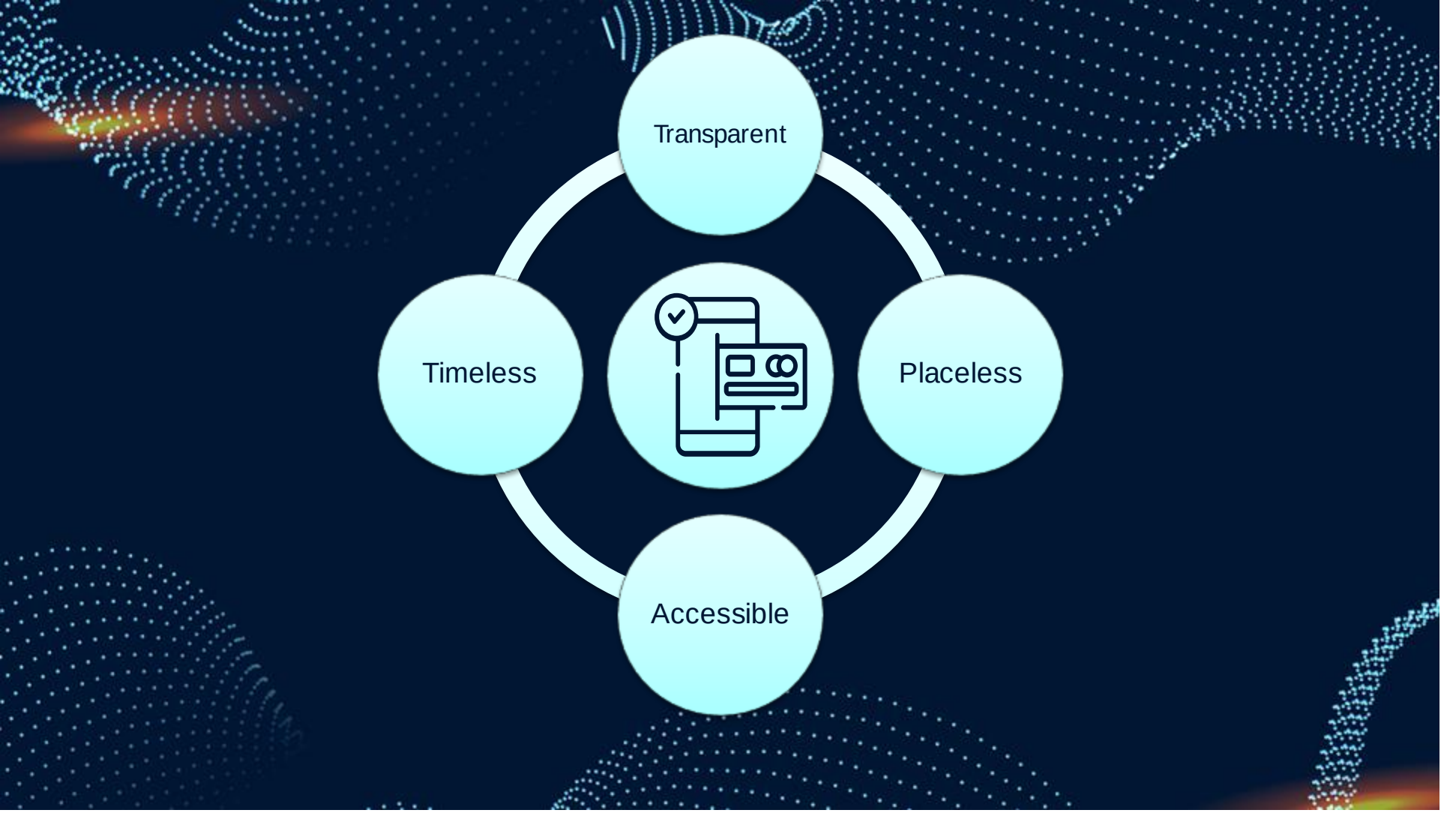
Human Bureaucrats	Political Machines
Based on Individual Agency	Based on Group Interests
Defend Unalienable Rights	Promote Positive Rights
Deliberative Environment Print Media	Deliberative Environment Social Media
Representative Democracy to be Informed	Direct Democracy to be Programmed



A Third House?

1. House of Lords
2. House of Commons
3. A Chamber for our Data Doubles?

1. A virtual chamber that legislates exclusively on AI in government decision-making
2. Citizens can see all data collected on them and how it is used
3. Based on the principles of direct democracy, mediates citizen access and input to political machines on a rolling basis
4. Citizens may green light deployment of political machines *or* use sliding scales to foreground ethical values they want to see prioritized
5. Ordinary people will be called upon to become citizen-philosophers as they debate the type of society they want their machines to nudge toward
6. The entirety of civil society will become the fourth pillar of government, complimenting the executive, legislative, and judicial


Transparent
Timeless
Placeless
Accessible