



EUROPEAN SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL
by European Scientific Institute



Paper: “Policy Pathways for Responsible AI-Assisted Surveys in Small Developing States: Institutional Adoption of H-VALIDA: A Conceptual Policy Analysis”

Submitted: 13 August 2026

Accepted: 30 September 2026

Published: 31 October 2026

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Doi: 10.19044/esj.2026.v22n28p25

Peer review:

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Reviewer 3: Montenegro Raul
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Reviewer A:
Recommendation: Revisions Required

The TITLE is clear and it is adequate to the content of the article.

The title, "Policy Pathways for Responsible AI-Assisted Surveys: Institutional Adoption of H-VALIDA in Small Developing States," is clear, precise, and fully adequate to the article's content. It accurately signals to the reader the dual focus of the manuscript: exploring high-level policy pathways for responsible AI integration in surveys, and examining the specific institutional adoption of the H-VALIDA framework within the context of small developing states.

The ABSTRACT clearly presents objectives, methods, results, and conclusions.

While the abstract does certain things well, it falls short on a standard structural requirement for academic research papers.

There are a few grammatical errors and spelling mistakes in this article.

Based on a close reading of the text, the manuscript exhibits a remarkably high standard of professional academic English. The prose is clean, formal, and well-structured, with appropriate use of specialized terminology across data governance, policy analysis, and survey methodology.

The study METHODS are explained clearly.

The methods are explained with commendable transparency. While it lacks traditional empirical field methods, the text clearly articulates its conceptual methodology, making the analytical framework transparent to the reader.

The results are clear and do not contain errors.

While clear in their presentation, the "results" (conceptual deductions) rely entirely on the soundness of the author's theoretical assumptions, since they have not yet been stress-tested in actual field environments.

The CONCLUSION or summary is accurate and supported by the content.

The CONCLUSION or summary is accurate and supported by the content.

The list of REFERENCES is comprehensive and appropriate.

The list of references is robust, spanning foundational and contemporary scholarship across critical data studies, algorithmic governance, human-centred AI, Indigenous data governance, and international policy frameworks (such as UNESCO and OECD guidelines).

Please rate the TITLE of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

5

Please rate the ABSTRACT of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

1

Please rate the LANGUAGE of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

5

Please rate the METHODS of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

3

Please rate the RESULTS of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

2

Please rate the CONCLUSION of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

4

Please rate the REFERENCES of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

4

Overall Recommendation!!!

Accepted, minor revision needed

Comments and Suggestions to the Author(s):

Reviewer Comments

1. Lack of Empirical Grounding and Operational Feasibility Critique: The author explicitly states that this is a conceptual and policy-oriented paper with no primary field data, empirical datasets, or practical pilot implementations evaluated. While theoretical models are valuable, proposing a complex, five-phase, eight-domain institutional roadmap (complete with mixed-mode sampling, local-language dataset creation, and community feedback loops) without testing its real-world friction points borders on speculative.

Recommendation: The manuscript needs to temper its prescriptive claims. The author should frame the H-VALIDA pathways much more cautiously as a hypothetical prototype rather than a robust roadmap, explicitly detailing the anticipated failure points (e.g., severe budget shortfalls, political interference, or absolute lack of technical personnel) that small developing states routinely encounter.

2. Overstated Methodological Novelty vs. Existing Standards Critique: The paper relies heavily on existing, well-established concepts (such as model cards, datasheets for datasets, human-in-the-loop validation, and Indigenous data sovereignty principles) but packages them under the proprietary acronym H-VALIDA. At times, it reads as though standard data governance best practices are being rebranded as a novel methodological breakthrough. Recommendation: The author must clearly delineate what is genuinely new about H-VALIDA compared to existing frameworks like the OECD AI Principles or UNESCO guidelines. How does H-VALIDA uniquely solve constraints in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) differently than standard data quality frameworks already in circulation?

3. Underestimation of Institutional Inertia and Political Economy Critique: Section 5.8 briefly

touches upon the political economy of survey production and external funding pressures, but the main text largely assumes that government agencies and statistical offices can smoothly transition through a 48-month phased pathway. In many small developing states, institutional high-level support is fleeting, brain drain of technical staff is constant, and donor-driven timelines dictate reality regardless of domestic guidelines. Recommendation: Expand the discussion on how institutions can protect these protocols during political transitions or sudden shifts in external funding. The paper currently underestimates the destructive impact of high staff turnover on maintaining "local evaluation datasets" or internal AI tool registers.

The manuscript frequently loops back to that it is a "policy-oriented conceptual paper" (found in the Abstract, Introduction, Methodology, and Discussion). This defensive repetition is unnecessary and disrupts the narrative flow. State the limitations clearly once in the introduction and methodology, and let the analysis stand on its merits. y: While the author is based in Belize and references regional contexts, some parts of the text read like generic global AI ethics literature. The manuscript would benefit from tightening the prose to anchor the challenges of multilingualism (Creole, Spanish, Mayan languages) and geographical isolation more directly into the core framework steps. Summary: The manuscript possesses a solid foundation and tackles a crucial gap in digital governance. However, it requires a more humble analytical tone regarding its un-tested framework, a tighter defense of its originality, and a more realistic appraisal of institutional decay and political pressures in small developing states.

Reviewer C:
Recommendation: Revisions Required

The TITLE is clear and it is adequate to the content of the article.

The title is clear, informative, and accurately reflects the main focus of the manuscript. It effectively identifies the central themes of responsible AI-assisted surveys, institutional adoption, small developing states, and the translation of methodological innovation into governance practice. Although relatively long, the title is appropriate for the scope and conceptual orientation of the paper.

The ABSTRACT clearly presents objectives, methods, results, and conclusions.

The abstract provides a clear overview of the problem addressed, the H-VALIDA framework, its intended institutional applications, and the main policy argument of the manuscript. It appropriately presents the paper as a policy-oriented conceptual and analytical examination rather than an empirical study. However, the methodological description could be more precise. The abstract indicates that the

analysis builds on critical data studies, human-centred AI scholarship, and the constraints facing statistical systems in Small Island Developing States, but it does not briefly explain the analytical procedure later described in the methodology section. A concise reference to the conceptual synthesis, documentary analysis, and scenario-based reasoning would improve methodological transparency.

One sentence also requires grammatical revision: “This article offers a policy-oriented conceptual and analytical examination of the H-VALIDA ... framework: a proposed hybrid methodological framework, and explores its implications...” The sentence should be restructured.

There are a few grammatical errors and spelling mistakes in this article.

The manuscript is generally well written, coherent, and accessible. The academic tone is appropriate and the terminology is largely consistent. The organisation of the sections also facilitates reading.

Nevertheless, the manuscript would benefit from careful language editing. Several sentences are long and syntactically dense, and some central formulations are repeated across the Introduction, Conceptual Outputs, Discussion, and Conclusions. In particular, recurrent statements concerning technology serving people, human accountability, inclusion, and gradual institutional adoption could be consolidated to reduce repetition. Minor grammatical, punctuation, and formatting issues should also be corrected.

The study METHODS are explained clearly.

The methodology is appropriate for a policy-oriented conceptual paper and, importantly, the author is transparent that the study does not provide empirical validation of H-VALIDA. The distinction between conceptual analysis and empirical testing is maintained consistently throughout the manuscript. The use of heuristic evaluation, structured scenarios, comparative conceptual analysis, documentary triangulation, and internal consistency checks provides a reasonable foundation for the proposed policy pathway.

However, the analytical procedure requires greater transparency. The manuscript should explain more explicitly how the literature and policy documents informing the analysis were identified and selected, how the eight institutional domains were derived, and how the five H-VALIDA principles were systematically applied across these domains.

The expression “expert-informed heuristic evaluation” should also be clarified. As presented, it appears that the analysis is informed by published expert scholarship rather than by direct expert consultation or an expert panel. The wording should avoid suggesting an empirical expert-validation procedure if none was undertaken.

The methodological rigor would be strengthened considerably by adding an analytical matrix showing how each H-VALIDA principle relates to identified risks, institutional domains, supporting literature or policy sources, and resulting recommendations.

The results are clear and do not contain errors.

The conceptual outputs are clearly presented and logically organised. The phased institutional adoption pathway is one of the strongest elements of the manuscript. Table 1 effectively

translates the conceptual argument into an accessible institutional roadmap, while the four illustrative scenarios help demonstrate how H-VALIDA principles could operate in practical survey contexts.

The author also appropriately distinguishes conceptual outputs from empirically demonstrated findings. This is important and should be retained.

Nevertheless, some elements require stronger justification. In particular, the timelines proposed for the five phases appear to be expert or analytical judgments rather than evidence-derived implementation periods. The manuscript already labels them as indicative, but the basis for these time intervals should either be explained or their illustrative status emphasised further.

The analysis would also be strengthened if the conceptual outputs were explicitly linked back to the five H-VALIDA pillars through a table or framework diagram.

The CONCLUSION or summary is accurate and supported by the content.

The conclusions are consistent with the conceptual analysis and appropriately acknowledge the non-empirical status of the proposed framework. The recommendations are clearly differentiated for national governments, institutions, development partners, regional actors, and future researchers, which increases the practical value of the manuscript.

The conclusion could nevertheless be made more concise. Several propositions already developed extensively in the Discussion are repeated. Some claims, particularly those concerning the institutional advantages associated with the small size of national systems and the feasibility of participatory validation, would also benefit from supporting evidence or more cautious wording.

Overall, the conclusion is logically supported by the conceptual argument, provided that it continues to be framed as a set of analytically derived propositions rather than empirically demonstrated effects.

The list of REFERENCES is comprehensive and appropriate.

The reference list contains several influential and appropriate works in responsible AI, human-centred AI, critical data studies, algorithmic accountability, Indigenous data governance, and international AI ethics. These sources provide a solid conceptual foundation for the manuscript.

Nevertheless, the literature base requires expansion in three areas.

First, the manuscript is specifically concerned with AI-assisted surveys, yet engagement with the core survey methodology and official statistics literature is limited. Greater attention should be given to survey quality, measurement error, mixed-mode survey design, automated coding of open-ended responses, machine-assisted translation, official statistics quality frameworks, and the validation of AI-supported statistical processes.

Second, a paper published in the current period on responsible and generative AI governance should engage more extensively with recent AI governance and risk-management developments. Much of the cited literature predates the rapid institutionalisation of generative AI.

Third, the manuscript repeatedly uses Belize as its principal contextual reference, but very few Belize-specific sources are included. Claims concerning Belize's multilingual population,

institutional capacity, statistical system, digital governance environment, data protection context, and development challenges should be supported with national or regional evidence. Relevant Caribbean and SIDS literature would also strengthen the claim of transferability. The manuscript should also verify the accuracy and consistency of all bibliographic entries and cross-check in-text citations against the reference list.

Please rate the TITLE of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

5

Please rate the ABSTRACT of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

4

Please rate the LANGUAGE of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

4

Please rate the METHODS of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

3

Please rate the RESULTS of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

4

Please rate the CONCLUSION of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

4

Please rate the REFERENCES of this paper.

[Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]

4

Overall Recommendation!!!

Accepted, minor revision needed

Comments and Suggestions to the Author(s):

The manuscript addresses a timely and important issue at the intersection of responsible AI, survey methodology, institutional governance, and sustainable development. Its particular strength lies in moving beyond abstract ethical principles and attempting to translate them into a phased institutional pathway suitable for capacity-constrained small developing states. The manuscript is well structured, clearly written, and appropriately transparent about its conceptual rather than empirical nature. The phased adoption model, Table 1, and the four illustrative scenarios are particularly useful contributions.

The manuscript nevertheless requires further development before publication.

1. The H-VALIDA framework itself should be presented more explicitly and systematically. The manuscript identifies five core elements - localisation, interpretability, documentation, accountability, and hybrid validation - but these are dispersed throughout the text. A dedicated figure or table defining each component, its conceptual foundation, its function in AI-assisted survey methodology, and its relationship to existing responsible AI approaches would make the contribution substantially clearer. This is especially important for demonstrating what is distinctive about H-VALIDA rather than simply consistent with existing responsible AI principles.

2. The analytical methodology should be made more transparent. The manuscript appropriately explains that it is a conceptual and policy-oriented study rather than an empirical evaluation. However, greater detail is needed regarding how the literature and policy documents were identified, how the eight institutional domains were derived, and how the five H-VALIDA principles were applied across those domains. The term “expert-informed heuristic evaluation” should also be clarified, since the manuscript appears to draw upon published expert scholarship

rather than direct expert consultation. An analytical matrix linking evidence, H-VALIDA principles, institutional risks, proposed safeguards, and recommendations would strengthen methodological traceability.

3. The survey-methodology foundation should be strengthened. Since the paper concerns AI-assisted surveys, the literature review should engage more directly with established scholarship and standards concerning survey quality, measurement error, mixed-mode data collection, automated coding of open-ended responses, translation and linguistic validation, and official statistical production. This would provide a stronger methodological bridge between responsible AI governance and survey science.

4. The Belize and small-state context requires stronger empirical and institutional grounding. Belize is repeatedly used as the principal contextual reference, but the manuscript currently relies primarily on broad international literature. More Belize-specific and Caribbean/SIDS sources are needed to support claims concerning statistical capacity, multilingualism, digital inclusion, institutional constraints, data governance, and the organisation of national statistical systems. This evidence would also make the argument for transferability to other small developing states more convincing.

5. The literature should incorporate more recent developments in AI governance. The existing references provide a strong foundational base, but the rapidly evolving governance environment surrounding generative AI requires greater engagement with recent policy, regulatory, public-sector AI, risk-management, and accountability literature.

6. Some proposed implementation parameters require clarification. The five-phase pathway is useful and practical. However, the proposed timelines should be presented clearly as indicative planning assumptions unless they can be supported through comparative institutional evidence. The same caution should apply whenever feasibility or expected benefits are discussed without empirical testing.

7. Some repetition can be reduced. Key propositions concerning human oversight, accountability, inclusion, public trust, and gradual institutional adoption recur across several sections. Consolidating these arguments would make the manuscript more concise and analytically sharper.

Overall, the manuscript has strong publication potential. The topic is relevant, the conceptual orientation is coherent, and the institutional adoption pathway offers practical value. The main revisions required concern clearer specification of the original H-VALIDA contribution, greater transparency in the conceptual methodology, deeper engagement with survey methodology, stronger Belize/SIDS contextual evidence, and a more current AI-governance literature base.

ESJ Manuscript Evaluation Form 2026

This form is designed to summarize the manuscript peer review that you have completed and to ensure that you have considered all appropriate criteria in your review. Your review should provide a clear statement to the authors and editors of the modifications necessary before the paper can be published, or the specific reasons for rejection.

Please respond within the appointed time so that we can give the authors timely responses and feedback.

NOTE: ESJ promotes a peer review procedure based on scientific validity and technical quality of the paper (not perceived impact). You are also not required to do proofreading of the paper. It could be recommended as part of the revision.

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Evaluation Criteria:

Please give each evaluation item a numeric rating on a 5-point scale, along with a thorough explanation for each point rating.

Questions	Rating Result [Poor] 1-5 [Excellent]
1. The title is clear, and it is adequate for the content of the article.	4
The title is clear, informative, and aligned with the manuscript's policy orientation. However, it is somewhat long. The author may consider shortening the subtitle or clarifying in the title that the article presents a conceptual or policy-oriented framework rather than an empirical evaluation.	
2. The abstract presents objectives, methods, and results.	3
The abstract identifies the purpose, scope, central argument, and contribution. It does not adequately describe the analytical method or explain how the literature and policy evidence were identified and synthesised. Because no empirical data were analysed, the abstract should avoid implying empirical results and should explicitly	

characterise the article as a conceptual, normative, or policy-design analysis.

3. There are a few grammatical errors and spelling mistakes in this article.	4
The manuscript is generally readable and uses a consistent formal register. Minor editing is still needed for punctuation, sentence length, repetition, and parallel structure. Several long sentences should be divided, and the manuscript should be checked for consistent British English, hyphenation, capitalisation, and terminology (for example, “small developing states,” “Small Island Developing States,” and “SIDS”).	
4. The study methods are explained clearly.	2
The methodological section is currently insufficient for a scholarly analytical article. It states that several bodies of literature were synthesised, but it does not report the sources or databases searched, search period, search terms, inclusion/exclusion criteria, document-selection process, analytical procedure, or how the eight domains and five phases were derived. The manuscript must also explain the origin and prior development of H-VALIDA, cite the foundational publication, and distinguish the present article’s new contribution from earlier work. If the work is intentionally a normative policy essay rather than a review, it should be labelled and structured accordingly.	
5. The results are clear and do not contain errors.	3
The proposed domains, phased pathway, implementation risks, and scenarios are coherent and practically useful. Nevertheless, this section is labelled “Results” even though no empirical analysis or reproducible review procedure is presented. It should be reframed as a proposed framework or analytical findings, or supported by a transparent analytical method. Claims specific to Belize—especially those concerning institutional capacity, language, statistical systems, digital exclusion, and governmental practice—require current national or regional evidence. The author should also justify the proposed timelines and operationalise validation requirements, including sampling principles, performance indicators, acceptable discrepancy thresholds, and responsibility for approval.	
6. The conclusions or summary are accurate and supported by the content.	4
The conclusions are consistent with the manuscript’s central argument and acknowledge the prospective nature of the framework. They should be moderated to avoid asserting institutional feasibility without empirical or stakeholder-based validation. The conclusion should distinguish clearly between claims supported by the reviewed literature, the author’s normative proposals, and matters requiring pilot testing.	
7. The references are comprehensive and appropriate.	3
The reference list includes relevant foundational sources on AI ethics, data justice, human-centred AI, and Indigenous data governance. However, it is too limited to substantiate the manuscript’s detailed claims about Belize and small-state statistical systems. Add recent Belizean, Caribbean, SIDS, official-statistics, survey-methodology, data-protection, and AI-governance sources. Verify every bibliographic record and add DOIs or stable publication details where available. In particular, check the accuracy and traceability of “World Bank (2022). Digital development in small states,” and standardise author names and complete conference-publication details.	

Overall Recommendation (mark an X with your recommendation) :

Accepted, no revision needed
Accepted, minor revision needed
Return for major revision and resubmission

Reject

Comments and Suggestions to the Author(s):

This manuscript addresses a timely and important issue and offers a clear, capacity-aware pathway for responsible use of AI in survey research. Its principal strengths are the emphasis on human oversight, documentation, inclusion, local-language validation, institutional accountability, and phased implementation. The manuscript is promising, but substantial revision is needed before publication.

Major revisions requested:

1. Clarify the article type and contribution. State whether this is a conceptual article, normative policy analysis, narrative review, or another design. Explain how it differs from and extends the foundational H-VALIDA work.
2. Strengthen the methodology. Describe the literature and policy-document search, eligibility criteria, period covered, selection procedure, analytical steps, and process used to derive the eight domains and five phases. If no systematic review was intended, describe a transparent and defensible method appropriate to a conceptual policy analysis.
3. Reconsider the “Results” label. Without empirical data or a reproducible evidence-synthesis process, present Section 4 as the proposed policy framework, analytical propositions, or policy and practice implications.
4. Ground the Belize focus. Add current national and regional sources on Belize’s statistical system, digital access, data governance, legal and institutional framework, multilingual survey conditions, and relevant public-sector capacity. Clearly separate evidence about Belize from general inferences about small states.
5. Operationalise the framework. Define minimum human-validation procedures, sampling logic for double coding, performance or discrepancy measures, escalation criteria, documentation requirements, responsible roles, and indicators for evaluating implementation. Justify the proposed phase timelines or identify them explicitly as provisional.
6. Moderate unsupported claims. Assertions about feasibility, under-representation, institutional capacity, vendor dependency, and the likely effects of safeguards should be supported by evidence or framed as hypotheses/propositions for future evaluation.
7. Reduce repetition. Several principles and recommendations recur in the introduction, results, discussion, and conclusion. Consolidating these passages would create space for methodological detail and Belize-specific evidence.
8. Audit the references. Verify bibliographic accuracy and traceability, complete DOIs/publication details, and add recent sources on official statistics, survey methodology, responsible AI governance, Caribbean/SIDS contexts, privacy, and Indigenous or community data governance.

With these revisions, the paper could make a useful contribution by translating responsible-AI principles into an implementable institutional pathway for resource-constrained settings.

Comments and Suggestions to the Editors Only: