Machine Legitimacy

Definition Reference (v1.0)

This document defines the concept of **Machine Legitimacy**, providing a neutral reference framework for evaluating whether a machine or autonomous system may be considered a legitimate operational actor within a defined human, legal, and organizational context.

1. Why Machine Legitimacy Matters

As machines increasingly act with autonomy, the question shifts from whether they function correctly to whether they may be trusted to act within delegated authority. Machine Legitimacy addresses this question.

2. Definition

Machine Legitimacy is the condition in which a machine or autonomous system is recognized as an authorized operational actor based on validated purpose, bounded authority, and accountable oversight.

3. Relationship to Operational Legitimacy

Machine Legitimacy establishes whether a system *may* act; Operational Legitimacy evaluates whether it *continues* to act appropriately over time. The two concepts are complementary and sequential.

4. Evaluation Dimensions

Machine Legitimacy is commonly evaluated through purpose alignment, authority delegation, role clarity, human accountability, and revocability.

5. Intended Use

This reference supports governance design, procurement decisions, regulatory discussion, and risk assessment for systems operating with delegated autonomy.

6. Status and Stewardship

This document is published as a public reference (v1.0). Stewardship is maintained by the Operational Legitimacy Working Group as a neutral, non-commercial reference body.