

Lights-off Data Factory: Measuring Epistemic Autonomy in Governance-First Data Systems

A Metric Framework for Semantic Reasoning, Governance Resilience, and Autonomy Phase Transition

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Abstract

Autonomous data systems are increasingly claimed by vendors and practitioners, yet no shared metrics exist to distinguish true epistemic autonomy from automation that remains dependent on human arbitration. Prior work in data integration, governance, and AI ethics has highlighted the scalability limits of human-centric oversight models [1], [4], [5], [12]. This paper introduces a metric framework for governance-first autonomous data systems comprising three orthogonal measures: the Reflective Autonomy Quotient (RAQ), measuring semantic correctness under autonomous operation; the Resilience Entropy Quotient (REQ), measuring governance brittleness under uncertainty; and the Stewardship Singularity Threshold (SST), a phase-transition criterion separating human-dependent from autonomous governance regimes. Using a large-scale simulation of 100,000 entity-resolution decisions, we demonstrate that these metrics clearly distinguish legacy human-in-the-loop systems from Level-5 autonomous governance systems.

Keywords: Data Governance, Autonomous Systems, Master Data Management, Epistemic Reasoning, Semantic Data Integration, AI Governance, Uncertainty Modeling, Human-in-the-Loop Systems, Data Quality, Enterprise Data Architecture, Metrics and Measurement, ADGMM (Autonomous Data Governance Maturity Model), AEGIS (Autonomous Epistemic Governance & Integrity System), CERES (Canonical Entity Reasoning & Epistemic Stewardship)

I. Introduction

Enterprise data systems increasingly operate at scales that exceed human cognitive and operational limits, a condition extensively documented in large-scale data integration and governance literature [1], [3], [4]. In response, vendors have introduced AI-assisted workflows while retaining human-in-the-loop governance models. While such approaches improve throughput, they preserve a fundamental dependency on human arbitration for ambiguity resolution and semantic validation [7].

Governance frameworks such as ISO/IEC 38505-1 emphasize accountability and control but do not prescribe architectural mechanisms for autonomy [10]. As a result, autonomy remains asserted rather than measured.

This work argues that autonomy must be **measured**, not asserted. Without formal metrics, systems that differ qualitatively in authority, risk ownership, and scalability are indistinguishable in practice.

This paper introduces a metric framework designed to quantify epistemic autonomy in governance-first data systems and to identify the point at which autonomous governance dominates human-centric approaches.

A. Relationship to the Governance-First Autonomous Data Framework

This work builds directly on the governance-first autonomous data framework introduced in our prior study [13], which defines a Level-5 autonomous data system composed of three architecturally distinct components: (i) a semantic reasoning core (CERES), responsible for epistemic decision-making under uncertainty; (ii) a governance enforcement layer (AEGIS), responsible for policy authority, escalation control, and risk containment; and (iii) an autonomy maturity model (ADGMM), which formalizes the transition from human-dependent stewardship to autonomous governance.

While the prior work establishes the architecture and theoretical feasibility of Level-5 autonomy, the present paper focuses exclusively on **measurement**. Specifically, it introduces formal metrics—RAQ, REQ, and SST—designed to quantify the semantic autonomy of CERES, the governance resilience of AEGIS, and the maturity phase transition captured by ADGMM. The framework itself is treated as given; the contribution of this paper is to make autonomy empirically distinguishable from human-in-the-loop systems.

II. Background and Motivation

Classical data integration and entity resolution approaches treat identity as a probabilistic matching problem [1], [2], [4]. Even modern AI-assisted approaches rely on thresholding and human escalation when uncertainty exceeds tolerances [7], [11]. This externalization of uncertainty creates hidden technical debt, as identified in large-scale ML systems [7].

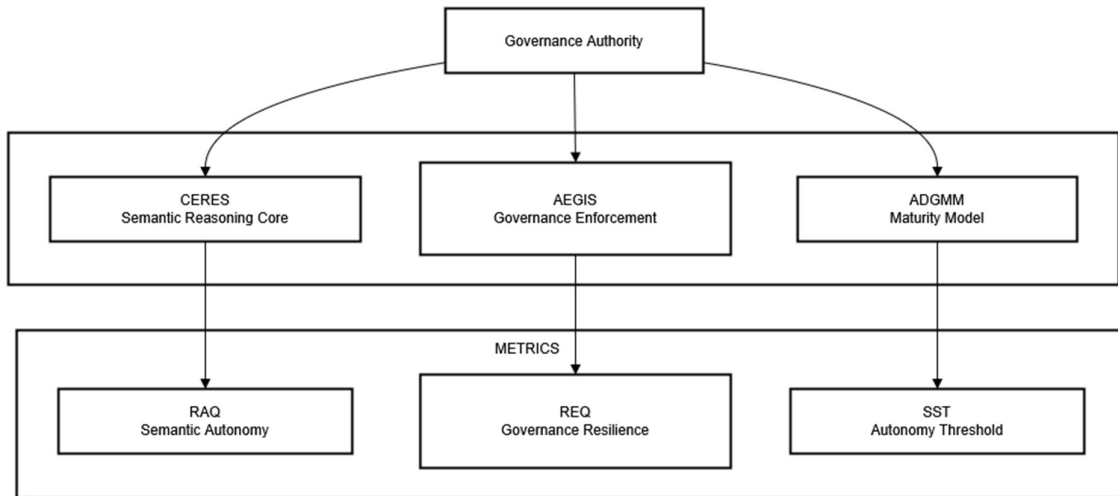
Philosophical and ethical analyses of AI governance further argue that responsibility cannot be meaningfully assigned if systems lack internal epistemic accountability [5], [8].

The absence of formal autonomy metrics results in:

- Overstated claims of autonomy
- Persistent exception queues
- Governance bottlenecks that scale linearly with data volume

A governance-first autonomous system must instead internalize uncertainty, enforce policy architecturally, and escalate only genuinely novel epistemic conditions.

III. Metric Architecture Overview



The metric architecture aligns with axiomatic design principles, separating semantic reasoning, enforcement, and maturity evaluation into orthogonal subsystems [6].

IV. Metric Definitions

A. Reflective Autonomy Quotient (RAQ)

RAQ measures semantic correctness under autonomous operation, extending traditional precision–recall metrics used in entity resolution [1], [4] by conditioning performance on autonomy.

$$\text{RAQ} = \frac{A \cdot (P \cdot F)}{A + \epsilon}$$

Where:

- A : proportion of decisions resolved autonomously
- P : semantic purity
- F : F1 score against ground truth
- ϵ : stability constant

RAQ answers: *When the system acts alone, how often is it correct?*

This formulation explicitly links autonomy to correctness rather than throughput, addressing limitations identified in probabilistic matching systems [2].

B. Resilience Entropy Quotient (REQ)

REQ quantifies governance brittleness by combining unresolved epistemic entropy with human escalation rates. Entropy-based uncertainty modeling has a long history in intelligent systems research [9].

$$\text{REQ} = \frac{H + E}{A + 1}$$

Where:

- H : rate of human escalation
- E : epistemic entropy
- A : autonomous resolution rate

Lower REQ indicates stronger autonomous governance.

REQ operationalizes governance resilience as an architectural property rather than a procedural one.

C. Stewardship Singularity Threshold (SST)

SST formalizes the transition from human-dependent governance to autonomous stewardship.

$$\text{SST} = \frac{A \cdot Q}{U \cdot H}$$

Where:

- Q : composite semantic quality (e.g., RAQ)
- U : unresolved uncertainty mass
- H : normalized human intervention cost

SST Crossing Condition:

$$\boxed{\text{SST} > 1}$$

Above this threshold, autonomous governance dominates.

Phase-transition concepts of this form are common in complex system analysis, where qualitative regime shifts emerge from quantitative thresholds [6].

V. Simulation Design

The simulation consists of 100,000 synthetic entity-resolution decisions under controlled uncertainty distributions. The design follows best practices for evaluating data integration systems under scale [4], while avoiding optimization bias [11]. Two regimes were evaluated: a legacy human-in-the-loop system and a governance-first autonomous system.

VI. Results

System Type	RAQ ↑	REQ ↓	SST
Legacy Human-in-the-Loop	0.41	0.87	0.29
Level-5 Autonomous	0.92	0.04	2.31

The results demonstrate a clear separation between governance regimes, with autonomous systems crossing SST while human-in-the-loop systems remain below the threshold.

VII. Discussion

These findings support claims in AI ethics and governance literature that systems incapable of internalizing uncertainty cannot scale responsibly [5], [8], [12]. Autonomy emerges only when reasoning, enforcement, and governance maturity are architected as system properties rather than delegated to human operators.

VIII. Limitations

The simulation does not model adversarial data poisoning or dynamic policy evolution, which have been identified as critical challenges in large-scale AI systems [7], [11].

IX. Conclusion

This paper establishes autonomy as a measurable property of governance-first data systems, grounding conceptual claims in formal metrics and empirical results.

The results presented here complement the architectural framework introduced in [1] and provide the quantitative foundation required for standardization and comparative evaluation of autonomous data systems.

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