

The close relationship between world leaders and tech magnates, the greatest example being that between Donald Trump and Elon Musk, makes the development of artificial intelligence happen at the backs of the general population. The debate of regulation versus innovation and moral dilemmas about intelligence that can obey dark motives.

Within the last few years, artificial intelligence (AI) has evolved from something relegated to sci-fi novels to a tool accessible by the average person. AI's potential and its possible application in fields such as healthcare, military defense, and scientific research is exciting for many. It is understandable, then, that many people across the world are desperate to innovate AI technologies to use in these areas.

Yet, it is precisely because this technology is so novel and powerful that there now emerges a debate about the regulation measures that ought to, or ought not, be implemented with regards to AI development. Nations and federations, like the European Union (EU), are implementing policies designed to protect users and consumers of the technologies. In 2024, the EU passed AI legislation that implemented security measures and guidelines that developers of the technology will have to follow in order to operate within those territories.

The case for others to follow

The United States, however, seems to be on a different page entirely. A few days ago, US Vice President, James David Vance, gave a speech during the Paris summit in which he defended an anti- AI regulation stance. According to the vice president, imposing too many security measures could disincentivize technological innovation, giving an advantage to other countries that may have fewer regulations or may already be leading the space; that is to say, China.

“There’s clearly a de-regulation renaissance happening in AI policy in the US right now”, says Annette Zimmerman, a political philosopher from the University of Wisconsin-Madison who specializes in AI ethics and policy.

Though Silicon Valley has never favored the regulation of technological development, Cameron Kirk-Giannini, a philosopher from Rutgers University who specializes in AI security, transparency and governance, thinks that this moment is the least opportune moment for tech companies to have the go-ahead from governments to innovate their technologies without safety measures: “It's in the first few

years when these systems are operational that they pose the greatest risk. I would rather have had the no safety message 4 years ago or in 4 years, but not now”.

Politicians and Tech Buddies

“I do see an ideological shift specifically among tech elites, and that is an embrace of authority. Not necessarily authoritarianism, but an embrace of authority”, comments Zimmermann. “I do see an ideological shift specifically among tech elites, and that is an embrace of authority. Not necessarily authoritarianism, but an embrace of authority”, they add.

“And you see the Trump administration cozying up in various extremely visible ways with tech executives. And now suddenly, the messaging is: We should not care about safety”, echoes Kirk-Giannini.

The influence and pressure of industry leaders is also present in policy outside of the United States. A report from Corporate Europe Observatory found that tech companies– including Google, Microsoft, Amazon and Oracle– influenced the AI safety policies the EU passed, succeeding in ensuring the regulations were not too stringent.

Zimmermann thinks that it is possible that this influence becomes a pattern, meaning that the US tendency toward AI deregulation could become a global trend: So the concern in this way is less that American elected officials will somehow try to pressure the heads of state or the regulators of other sovereign countries to adopt particular policies, but the concern is that American companies might feel emboldened to exert very direct pressure on other countries, and these other countries might just lack the economic power to strongly resist those efforts”.

They add, “In general, AI policy tends to trickle down across the globe. So it’s not unheard of that other countries will tailor and mold their regulatory efforts in response to what happens in the US”.

The myth of apolitical technology

This ideological shift among CEOs leading AI innovation, both in the United States and globally, coupled with the influence that this elite group exerts over policy, presents a problem when it comes to the safety of these technologies for the general public and the preservation of democratic values.

An example of this came when, during his speech, Vice President Vance proclaimed that AI technologies developed in the United States would be free from ideological leanings and would not tolerate censorship. And, while these sound like desirable objectives, these ideals are not what they seem.

“First of all, it’s impossible to engage in ideologically neutral speech”, expressed Zimmermann. The professor explained that philosophers of language and political philosophers argue that the affirmations and declarations that we can make always exist within a spectrum of political ideology. Pretending that generative AI tools do not exist within this same political spectrum is misleading.

“It is essential for enabling that kind of collective public deliberation to make salient what kinds of political choices underpin AI related design and deployment choices. This stance of presumed ideological neutrality stifles and hinders productive democratic deliberations rather than promoting it”, they argue.

Additionally, the censorship that the Vice President points to could be something other distinct to what he implies.

When people like Vance talk about censorship and ideological neutrality, I think what they have in mind is content moderation”, opines the Rutgers professor. “They’re basically arguing for the view that there should be no content moderation on social media platforms. And there should be no kind of content moderation in the outputs of AI systems”.

“Any attempt to put some guardrails on an AI tool is artificially, and in my view, misleadingly construed as censorship”, adds Zimmerman. This presents grave problems when it comes to democratic discussion and participation.

Acceptable AI Uses

“Many people in the AI safety community have been worried about the risks of AI precisely because unregulated and unmoderated forums for discussion seem likely to lead to polarization and lead to a degradation of democratic deliberation and a weakening of democratic institutions”, explains Kirk-Giannini.

The worries around content moderation is not the only concern about a future of regularized AI development. Kirk-Giannini is troubled that governments are singularly focused on issues of national

security, such as protection from cyber attacks by foreign adversaries, and overlook issues with the implementation of AI in other political sectors; for instance, the development of agent military weapons carry with them the risk that we lose control over our own machines. Though Kirk-Giannini admits that these are unlikely situations, ignoring these kinds of risks associated with AI implementation is a mistake.

“I think that we need to think about an inclusive vision of AI safety where we care not just about national security, but also about ethics, bias, and the harms that it causes, and about serious concerns about small probability, events that could be catastrophic. The narrowing of the focus only to one of those categories strikes me as likely to lead to negative outcomes”, he opines.

Zimmerman also believes that we should be sure to avoid the blind implementation of AI technologies. The regulating of these technologies, in this sense, would not only aim at making them safe for use, but would also strive to democratically decide the uses we want to give to AI: The key question when thinking about AI is more, what kind of purpose do we want to pursue when we use AI in a domain. And that is a question we should decide together as democratic constituencies because different countries might differ on what an acceptable purpose looks like”.