



POSITION STATEMENT

Democratic Use of Artificial Intelligence

*Adopted by the IEEE-USA
Board of Directors (November 2021)*

IEEE-USA believes that AI systems can increase quality of life, improve government efficiency, and promote societal well-being. However, when used improperly or by malicious actors, AI systems can jeopardize human rights, violate the U.S. Constitution, create and amplify harmful mis- and disinformation, and pose severe threats to individual and collective privacy. US government action and collaboration with like-minded states can help ensure that AI systems promote rather than threaten democratic values. IEEE-USA recommends that the U.S. government:

1. Encourage international standards, diplomacy, and agreements to uphold human rights, promote innovation and commerce, and govern AI systems and techniques.¹ While there has been considerable progress in declarations on the ethical use of AI systems by governments, corporations, and international organizations, there is a need for an overall framework that links national and global efforts to address the use of AI in ways that support democracy. We recommend that the U.S. government:

- Lead the development of such a framework as well as promote its use and further development among allies and like-minded nations. This can be achieved through:
 - Existing and evolving standards;
 - Diplomatic efforts;
 - Strong domestic and international intellectual property policy; and,
 - Strengthening both domestic and international agreements on the ethical uses of AI systems; as well as how data is collected, used, and retired; and,
- Undertake and promote collaboration with companies, academics, and stakeholders in relevant technical and social scientific fields within the context of this common framework.

¹ See the IEEE-USA position statement on “Accelerating Inclusive AI Innovation by Building Trust,” https://ieeusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/AIPC_BuildingTrustInAI.pdf.

2. Promote transparency, human agency, and accountability in AI systems to reduce the promotion of extremism, misinformation, and disinformation.

The AI systems that drive content recommendation systems used by online platforms can create echo chambers that are harmful to society. To mitigate the harmful impacts of these systems, we recommend that the U.S. government:

- Establish clear transparency standards that allow users to understand why they were shown certain content, particularly when it may be the result of commercial or foreign entities;
- Invest in increasing technical literacy to improve public understanding of personal information that AI systems may infer about them, and how these systems could influence their thinking; and,
- Partner with allies and like-minded nations to establish transparent ethical guidelines for the use and accountability of AI systems that could manipulate individuals or influence public opinion so that the public can understand who is attempting to influence them and how they are doing it.

3. Support human rights and democratic governance of AI through the rule of law and the right to privacy.

To encourage the development and implementation of AI systems that respect and further human rights, we recommend that the U.S. government:

- Establish principles for the design and operational use of AI systems to prevent violations of human rights and the U.S. Constitution;
- Create, where possible, accountability mechanisms for groups deploying AI systems that have the potential to violate human rights principles or the U.S. Constitution;
- Require the disclosure of when AI and automated decision systems are used, and how their use may impact users; and,
- Increase investments in research on the human rights impacts of AI systems.

To ensure that AI systems used by popular online platforms promote democracy, we recommend that the U.S. government:

- Create partnerships between government, industry, and academia to monitor the spread and impacts of mis- and disinformation, extremist content, and foreign malign influence on internet platforms, subject to appropriate legal and constitutional limitations; and,
- Place restrictions on the personal data that foreign-operated internet platforms can collect about U.S. users, preventing anti-democratic actors from performing sophisticated microtargeting of propaganda.

To promote the democratic governance of AI systems,² we recommend that the U.S. government:

- Increase investment in public education about potential impacts of AI (including both its capabilities and limitations); and,
- Develop mechanisms for soliciting broad public input on the governance of AI, particularly from marginalized or vulnerable communities.

4. Protect intellectual property (IP) from manipulation including theft, excessive patent filing, and abuse caused by incorporating patented technology into international standards. IP policy should be recognized as a national priority with special commitment to IP policy enhancement around AI-related emerging technologies. We recommend that the U.S. government:

- Combat any actions that would directly or indirectly negatively influence international standards settings;
- Combat the injection of a large body of low-quality prior art that would adversely impact the United States Patent and Trademark Office; and,
- Continue and expand efforts to counter and sanction the foreign theft of intellectual property through hacking, espionage, blackmail, and illicit technology transfer.

5. Clarify the lines between free speech and censorship in content moderation. Internet platforms use AI systems to select, target, and promote content. These systems often amplify content that many consider to be false or manipulative. Given the exponentially increasing quantity of content and lack of knowledge of speaker identity, individuals using these platforms are disadvantaged in verifying the accuracy of content and sources. However, actions and mechanisms to rectify these problems must be carefully balanced with the freedom of expression. Without affecting individuals' right to freedom of expression, we recommend that the U.S. government:

- Establish guidelines for transparent content moderation policies that limit:
 - the ability to create fake accounts to promote or amplify messages at large scale;
 - the ability to spread artificially generated harmful audio, video or photographic material that appropriate or mimic real people without consent (“deepfakes”); and
 - the ability to spread messages that are factually incorrect or carefully crafted to manipulate and mislead;
- Establish guidelines clarifying content moderator’s rights and responsibilities for regulating speech that balance openness,

² See also the IEEE-USA position statement on “Effective Governance of AI.”

transparency, and free speech with platforms' right to control their products.

- Require that AI systems, which are limited in their ability to accurately and transparently detect harmful content, not be exclusively relied upon for content moderation;
- Require that internet platforms provide, subject to appropriate privacy restrictions, the data necessary for researchers and the public to independently evaluate the extent of possible manipulation or abuse; and,
- Scale guidelines for accounts and platforms so that they increase with the size of their audiences and reach.

This statement was developed by IEEE-USA's Artificial Intelligence Policy Committee and represents the considered judgment of a group of U.S. IEEE members with expertise in the subject field. IEEE-USA advances the public good and promotes the careers and public policy interests of the nearly 150,000 engineering, computing and allied professionals who are U.S. members of IEEE. The positions taken by IEEE-USA do not necessarily reflect the views of IEEE, or its other organizational units.