

AI GOVERNANCE & DEMOCRACY:

*A Statement of Principles and
Transatlantic Research Goals*



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CONTENTS

■ INTRODUCTION	4
■ TRANSATLANTIC DEFINITIONS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE	6
■ CORE UNDERSTANDINGS OF SAFE AND DEMOCRATIC AI GOVERNANCE	7
■ SHARED PRINCIPLES	8
■ PROPOSED RESEARCH GOALS	9
■ DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE AND OVERSIGHT	9
■ LEGAL AND REGULATORY INNOVATION	10
■ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF AI	10
■ COUNTERING EXTREMISM AND ENGAGING COMMUNITIES	11
■ INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY	11
■ REFERENCES	12
■ FUNDERS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	13

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Introduction

As artificial intelligence rapidly reshapes global society, the need for coordinated transatlantic governance has become increasingly urgent. The United States and European Union, representing two of the world's largest democratic economies and technological powers, stand at a crucial junction. Their current and largely distinct approaches to regulation will contribute to determining whether AI development serves democratic values or undermines them.

We are a transatlantic interdisciplinary group of researchers interested in AI ethics and governance and part of an award-winning strategic partnership between two higher education institutions – one in the United States (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) and one in Germany (University of Tübingen). In March 2025, we gathered in Chapel Hill, NC, to consider the state of transatlantic dialogue on AI governance. Despite recent setbacks and significant geopolitical shifts between our respective governments, we advocate for continued robust transatlantic dialogue in this document, and we offer a commitment to a statement of transatlantic principles and research goals for AI governance.

This statement of principles and research goals outlines a framework for transatlantic cooperation on AI governance, emphasizing shared democratic values while acknowledging distinct regulatory traditions. It attempts to leverage and reconcile U.S. strengths in innovation with EU commitments to human rights and social justice, obviously no small task, and, admittedly, an oversimplification of transatlantic policy differences. (The EU obviously cares about innovation; the U.S. has a history of advancing civil rights.) But in the area of AI governance, the current and evolving regulatory structures lean toward preserving U.S. innovation and protecting EU citizens from the risks posed by it.

As this report explains, the current climate sees both partners moving in different directions with regard to state AI regulation. The current political challenges notwithstanding, this report emphasizes the urgency of ongoing cooperation and recognizes that effective oversight must extend beyond technical specifications to address fundamental questions of power, justice, and human dignity in an AI-driven world without undermining what are significant research advances brought about by new AI technologies.

A transatlantic partnership offers unique advantages in AI governance and sustaining democratic interests. The EU's robust regulatory framework, exemplified by the AI Act and its risk-driven approach (European Commission, n.d.), which characterizes what uses of AI must receive more or less oversight from regulators and the penalties for violations, contrasts to the largely hands-off and innovation-driven approach of the United States. Together, these differing perspectives create tension but also opportunity.

Early transatlantic collaboration on AI governance was prioritized during President Biden's term with the establishment of the [EU-US Trade and Technology Council](#) (European Commission, n.d.). The Trade and Technology Council (TTC) served as a forum for the United States and European Union to coordinate approaches to key global trade, economic, and technology issues and to deepen transatlantic trade and economic relations. It encouraged meetings like our own. Established during the EU-US Summit in Brussels in June 2021, the Council last met in Fall 2024 but was halted after the election of President Trump. European officials expect that any revival of that group would be much more limited (Belton and Gruenig, 2025). At the time of this writing, there are no future meetings scheduled.

The OECD, in which the US and Europe are also partners, has likewise held meetings on AI and democracy, leading to several collaborative sites for developers, policy analysts and researchers. Notable among these are the [OECD](#), AI Policy Observatory, a key platform for sharing data, policy tools and strategies and [Globalpolicy.AI](#), which supports international dialogue and coordination on AI governance (OECD, n.d.; Global Partnership on AI, n.d.).

This collaboration must not end. Indeed, cooperation is arguably more critical than ever as technology companies and some world leaders advance an alternative vision of AI that conflicts with democratic values and human rights.

Moreover, the interconnected nature of AI development makes isolated regulatory approaches insufficient. Without oversight, data can flow freely across borders and jurisdictions without adequate protection. Such AI systems are deployed globally, and their impacts ripple through international markets and societies. Only through coordinated transatlantic action can we effectively address challenges such as algorithmic bias, privacy protection, labor market disruption (including but not limited to intellectual property theft), the concentration of technological power, and adverse environmental consequences.

Our statement of principles and research goals offers a continued commitment to transatlantic dialogue in this challenging moment. It explores the need for a shared taxonomy (first called for by the TTC), and it seeks a series of joint research goals not only for the UNC - Tübingen partnership, but for other transatlantic researchers.

Transatlantic Definitions of Artificial Intelligence

As the US-EU Trade and Technology Council recognized, shared terminologies and taxonomies are essential for operationalizing trustworthy or democratic AI and risk management (European Commission, 2022). Definitions of artificial intelligence vary among governing institutions, and especially in the United States, where AI has not yet been legislated by federal law, save for the National Artificial Intelligence Initiative (NAII), which was passed in 2021 and established only broad mandates for advisory bodies and coordination among executive agencies (National Artificial Intelligence Initiative Act of 2020, 2021). The NAII definition, which has been used in executive orders by both President Biden and President Trump, reads as follows:

The term "artificial intelligence" means a machine-based system that can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, make predictions, recommendations or decisions influencing real or virtual environments. Artificial intelligence systems use machine and human-based inputs to—

- (A) perceive real and virtual environments;
- (B) abstract such perceptions into models through analysis in an automated manner; and
- (C) use model inference to formulate options for information or action. (15 U.S.C. 9401(3)).

The European Union's definition in the AI Act, which was passed by the 27 members of the EU Parliament in 2024, also describes AI essentially as a machine-based system, but varies in its emphasis on the technology's influence, including its autonomous and adaptive capabilities:

An "AI system" means a machine-based system that is designed to operate with varying levels of autonomy and that may exhibit adaptiveness after deployment, and that, for explicit or implicit objectives, infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions that can influence physical or virtual environments (European Union, 2024, art. 3(1)).

That these current and governing definitions of AI have different emphases at this early juncture is notable. At present, the U.S. government conceives of AI more in terms of its technical functionality whereas the EU definition foregrounds AI's potential for unrestrained effects, and therefore raises immediate discussion about potential risks.

Additionally, President Trump in July 2025 unveiled America's new AI Action Plan, which includes removing regulations on AI development, as well as exporting American AI, modernizing U.S. data centers, and removing language on diversity, equity and inclusion from LLMs (The White House, 2025).

As a result, transatlantic discussions about AI governance will differ and present challenges. Our group experienced such tensions as we attempted to work across them and the various disciplines represented. Technologies can be defined as both functional and altering. New technologies both act on society and have various effects. It was clear from our discussion that any progress on transatlantic AI terminology will need to address functionality and effects, in addition to an ongoing commitment to democratic norms and regular societal inputs about new applications.

Core Understandings of Safe and Democratic AI Governance

In numerous publications, there is a broad consensus on general principles for the safe and ethically acceptable use of AI (see Jobin et al., 2019) and the concept of “democratic AI” (Seger et al., 2023; Koster et al., 2022). These include human oversight, transparency, fairness, reliability, data protection, accountability, and environmentally friendly system design (see AIEG, 2020). General ethical principles, such as fairness, are generally accepted across political and social divides. The challenge is to translate these principles into concrete terms for technology development and application across transatlantic exchanges.

The notion of developing “democratic AI” is also gaining traction in the literature, and reflects the idea that AI systems should be governed, developed and used in ways that reflect democratic values such as transparency, accountability, inclusivity and public participation. Seger and her colleagues identify four kinds of “democratic AI” research including: (1) the democratization of AI use, (2) the democratization of AI development, (3) the democratization of AI profits, and (4) the democratization of AI governance (Seger et al., 2023). The notion of “AI governance” in our discussions referred to both governance by the state but also governance by private actors and corporations in the development of new applications. Our shared principles are directed at both transatlantic state and private actors.

At our conference, our common assumption was that AI technologies are not inevitable, and that their development and widespread use are subject to democratic governance. We agreed that governance must be analyzed through lenses of power, systems, sustainability, justice, capital, race, gender, and a commitment to democratic norms, and that whatever the source of the narratives, be it research or otherwise, they must address

fundamental human concerns, not just technical specifications. This is because the impact of AI extends beyond technical capabilities to social and political consequences, including environmental consequences. Additionally, we discussed how AI is fundamentally reshaping labor relations and economic structures.

Shared Principles

The proposed set of shared principles below champions democratic values, human rights, justice, and inclusive innovation in the age of AI. It emphasizes safeguarding social cohesion and individual autonomy, especially in the face of surveillance and extremist manipulation. The principles advocate for transparent and accountable AI governance through open standards and regulatory diversity, while placing collective benefit above efficiency. They promote ethical and human-centered research practices, equitable access to AI's advantages, and robust protections for privacy, intellectual property, and vulnerable groups. Ensuring workforce stability, preserving meaningful labor, and addressing power concentration in the AI ecosystem are paired with a strong environmental ethic focused on sustainability and responsible resource use. Together, these commitments define a values-driven framework for navigating transatlantic AI governance.

- ***Commit to democratic values, justice, and social cohesion***
 - Build democratic resilience
 - Prevent extremists from weaponizing social and economic changes from AI
 - Appreciate different regulatory approaches, especially those that balance innovation with social protection, and without sacrificing commitment to core democracy, fairness principles, and justice
 - Maintain human autonomy and social connections, particularly with growth of the surveillance state
- ***Demand accountability, transparency, and standards***
 - Prioritize transparency and accountability in AI development and ownership
 - Commit to open standards for AI development and use
- ***Engage in ethical and human-centered AI research***
 - Use human-centered design strategies and work alongside affected communities in AI research and development
 - Prioritize collective benefit over efficiencies
 - Ensure equitable distribution of AI benefits
 - Increase AI literacy and public awareness of AI risks and benefits

- ***Prioritize human rights, individual protections, and collective self-determination***
 - Preserve human privacy and self-determination
 - Protect children and vulnerable populations
 - Maintain strong human intellectual property rights
 - Address dependence on certain providers of AI and power concentration in AI
 - ***Aim for workforce and economic stability***
 - Protect against workforce destabilization, poor working conditions and economic precarity from AI
 - Preserve meaningful human work
 - ***Take environmental responsibility***
 - Support green computing initiatives, including environmental impact and resource management assessments for AI systems
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Proposed Research Goals

The proposed research goals below reflect a visionary approach to shaping AI policy and governance through inclusive, pluralistic, values-driven inquiry. They center democratic resilience and oversight by exploring public accountability, transatlantic cooperation, and the integrity of information systems amid growing surveillance threats. Legal and regulatory innovation is prioritized through comparative frameworks, transparency mandates, and culturally attuned governance structures that support worker autonomy. The agenda also addresses the far-reaching social and economic impacts of AI, with a commitment to equity, labor protections, and mitigating systemic inequalities. Community engagement and counter-extremism efforts underscore the importance of participatory infrastructure and narrative framing. Finally, environmental responsibility emerges through investigations into sustainability metrics, climate mitigation potential, and the material demands of AI infrastructures. Together, these priorities lay the groundwork for a proposed transatlantic research framework for our two institutions or other like-minded transatlantic partnerships.

Democratic resilience and oversight

- Investigate strategies for building transatlantic democratic resilience and maintain human autonomy
- Develop frameworks for public oversight of AI systems
- Explore current transatlantic oversight bodies and capabilities; make recommendations for future cooperation and effective knowledge sharing

- Explore how we safeguard reliable information and knowledge-producing institutions in the public interest
- Measure and mitigate the impact of AI-driven workplace surveillance on democratic participation
- Investigate how economic insecurity and AI-driven workplace changes influence susceptibility to extremist narratives
- Investigate how AI stakeholder engagement and human-centered design can be meaningfully measured and improved
- Search which media narrative frameworks effectively challenge techno-solutionist approaches to AI
- Explore the creative potential of AI in art and culture to critically reflect the interplay between technology and society

Legal and regulatory innovation

- Explore differences between US/EU legal traditions and strengths/benefits for regulating AI, and how to balance rapid technological change with effective oversight
- Investigate how to strengthen criminal procedure law to regulate law enforcement AI powers
- Explore how to strengthen antitrust measures to prevent AI-driven market concentration and mandate transparency about AI profitability and ownership
- Investigate incentives for meaningful private self-regulation
- Address which policy frameworks best protect worker autonomy while enabling beneficial AI integration
- Research how labor-centered approaches to AI governance can be effectively communicated to diverse stakeholders
- Evaluate the effectiveness of AI governance structures and develop measures
- Research how alternative governance mechanisms effectively challenge techno-solutionist approaches to AI

Social and economic impacts of AI

- Address economic precarity created by AI implementation; develop clear guidelines for ethical AI deployment in workplace settings and meaningful responses to automation
- Investigate the measurable effects of AI implementation on workforce stability across different sectors
- Study how AI-driven productivity gains can be equitably distributed among workers, shareholders, and affected persons
- Explore how different models of AI ownership and control affect labor conditions and economic inequality

- Address which research methodologies can assess AI's impact on traditionally excluded, structurally dominated communities
- Research how to mitigate or challenge the effects of AI systems that perpetuate existing social inequalities
- Investigate how to combat ethics-washing through genuine stakeholder involvement

Countering extremism and engaging communities

- Establish AI empowerment hubs for community engagement and frameworks for evaluating infrastructural power
- Develop collaborative research platforms and mechanisms for sharing best practices
- Explore compelling alternatives to dystopian and/or extremist narratives and promote understanding-oriented public engagement like citizens councils on AI developments
- Investigate how economic insecurity and workplace surveillance create fertile ground for radicalization and address potential solutions

Infrastructure and environmental responsibility

- Study AI infrastructures and their systemic effects with an eye toward assessment protocols and other regulatory frameworks
 - Consider which metrics can accurately assess the full environmental impact of large AI systems
 - Consider how AI might be used to mitigate climate change impacts, and whether those benefits outweigh its environmental costs
 - Explore how resource requirements for AI development align with global sustainability goals
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