Written by **Luis Miguel** on November 10, 2023

Obama Wades Into AI Debate as Democrats Promote Greater Control

Artificial intelligence has quickly become the subject of intense political debate. Amid the noise, it can be difficult to accurately sort out truth from politically charged alarmism. But one thing is certain: Various forces view AI as potentially advantageous to their plans for tyrannical control and hope to steer the technology's development in a direction favorable to them.

As recently reported by NBC News, former President Barack Obama has now publicly stepped into the AI discussion. He was present and delivered the keynote address at the Obama Foundation's annual Democracy Forum last week. This year, the event focused on the progress and dangers of artificial intelligence.

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Obama lavished praise on the Biden White House for recently signing an executive order on AI that creates far-reaching federal oversight over and investment in the technology, though he added that "there are some big risks associated with" it.

For the Obama crowd, one of those "risks" is the danger that AI will be used to further discrimination. This idea was expounded upon in a panel titled "Weighing AI and Human Progress," which featured Alondra Nelson, a professor of social science at the Institute for Advanced Study.

According to Nelson, "There's already evidence that the tools sometimes discriminate and sort of amplify and exacerbate bias in life — big problems that we're already trying to grapple with in society."
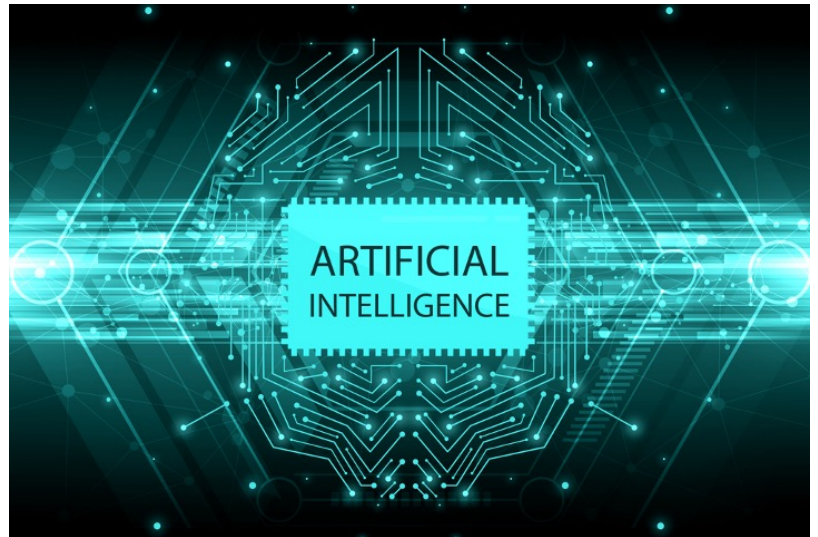
As NBC noted of the arguments made at the Democracy Forum:

> People in positions of privilege tend to be overrepresented in training data for language models, which incorporates encoded biases like racism, misogyny and ableism.

> Furthermore, just in the last year multiple Black people have said they were misidentified by facial recognition technology, which is based on AI, leading to unfair criminalization. In Georgia, 28-year-old Randall Reid said he was falsely arrested and jailed in 2022 after Louisiana authorities used facial recognition technology to secure an arrest warrant linking him to three men involved in theft.

The outlet also cites polling from Pew Research Center claiming that 20 percent of black adults who believe there is a problem with racial bias in hiring practices think artificial intelligence would make the issue worse. By contrast, 1 in 10 white, Asian, and Latino adults feel the same way.

Hany Farid, a professor at the University of California, Berkeley, said during the aforementioned panel

that, because AI hiring tools use data from the past, they carry the risk of perpetuating human biases.

"That predictive AI is based on historical data," said Farid. "So, if your historical data is biased, which it is — against people of color, against women, against the LGBTQ community — well guess what? Your AI is going to be biased. So, when we push these systems without fully understanding them, all we are doing is repeating history."

Biden's recently signed executive order focuses on giving federal agencies influence in the market through their enforcement instruments and buying power. As one example, the order calls on the Federal Trade Commission to take action on anti-competitive behavior and consumer harms in AI.

A notable aspect of the executive order is that it empowers the federal government to monitor private-sector development of AI systems by a mandate requiring companies to provide the government with reports detailing how they train and test "dual-use foundation models," which include the most powerful artificial intelligence systems.

In the sphere of cybersecurity, Biden's executive order requires firms involved in creating AI models to inform the Commerce Department how they intend to protect their technology from espionage and digital sabotage. Big cloud providers such as Amazon and Microsoft would have to let the government know each time foreigners rent server space for the purpose of training large AI models. This is all for the declared aim of keeping AI models from becoming susceptible to enemy foreign powers.

The order notably advances Democratic causes, such as directing the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security to streamline visa applications and appointments for immigrants who intend to work in artificial intelligence.

It also directs several agencies, such as the State and Commerce departments, to launch an overseas campaign to promote the United States as a good destination for foreigners who want to study or work in AI and related technologies. Under this order, the Department of Labor must ask the private sector for data about where advanced-skill immigrants are most needed.

The New American also previously reported that the Biden administration used the $1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan to utilize $132,000 (with a total of $550,436 expected to be given over the next five years) for the purpose of developing AI technology capable of reading through social media content to identify "implicit bias" and microaggressions, the latter being defined, per the standards of a former University of Washington research project, as language that might offend members of "marginalized" (read: "non-Christian, non-white") groups.

Like any technology, artificial intelligence clearly has potential for great good as well as misuse. But it seems Democrats want to exert control over the AI field, not out of concern for the public good, but to weaponize it for use in furthering their agenda and persecuting their rivals.

![New American]

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