

Title of Submission:

Beyond the AI race: why global governance is the greatest innovation

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Body of Submission:

As artificial intelligence (AI) evolves rapidly, the urgency to govern it responsibly becomes more pressing by the day. We are standing at a pivotal moment, one where the choices we make today will shape not just technological outcomes, but also the foundations of our societies, economies, and planetary well-being.

Even as the UN and other international agencies advocate for global AI regulation, major players – particularly the US, UK, and China – seem increasingly hesitant to fully commit. While the US and UK are currently moving towards light-touch, innovation-driven approaches that prioritize industry leadership over binding rules, China leans toward a state-controlled model aligned with its national priorities. Their reluctance undermines efforts to build the effective, inclusive governance frameworks we urgently need, and may encourage others to also sideline global cooperation in favour of fragmented, self-serving strategies.

But AI governance is not optional, it is essential. It protects rights, upholds global values, and ensures long-term economic stability and sustainable innovation. Without global governance, we open the door to a race to the bottom, marked by short-term thinking, ethical shortcuts, and growing global inequality. We cannot allow geopolitical competition to derail the collective responsibility required to ensure AI serves the common good. Now is the moment to strengthen our commitment to global, values-driven governance, not to stall it. Meanwhile, AI governance shouldn't chase every new technology, but instead follow clear principles: transparency, fairness, explainability, and accountability. These form a foundation for adaptable policy that protects rights and safety. Tools like regulatory sandboxes, public engagement, and stronger international coordination support this flexible yet high-standard approach as AI evolves.

The best competitive advantage is not ruthless speed, but wise collaboration, especially when the stakes include trust, stability, and the health of our planet. In this context, the European Union's €200 billion investment in regulated, human-centered AI stands out. This visionary approach demonstrates how regulation can act not as a brake on innovation but as a stepping stone for it. The EU's commitment to ethics, inclusion, and sustainability offers a powerful alternative to the more narrowly competitive models pursued by the US and China. Yet, funding alone is not enough. Investment must be accompanied by sustainable practices, equitable access, and strengthened social cohesion. Other countries—Canada, Japan, Brazil—are also making important strides. But this is not a race with a single winner. It's a collective effort, and meaningful progress depends on a globally aligned framework that ensures AI serves all of humanity.

Still, I am deeply concerned about the growing competition to dominate the AI landscape. China, the US, and others are increasingly viewing AI as a tool of economic and military supremacy. This race risks concentrating power in a handful of nations or corporations, sidelining most of the world and worsening inequality. China, the US, and others view AI through the lens of strategic dominance. But AI is not a zero-sum game. True progress requires transparency, ethical alignment, and shared governance.

One of the greatest ethical challenges today is the erosion of human agency through opaque, unaccountable AI systems. That's why I advocate for Earth alignment, as we introduced in a recent article in *Nature Sustainability*. This framework emphasizes the need for AI governance to be anchored in environmental sustainability, global justice, and societal cohesion. These goals cannot be achieved in isolation or through regional silos. They require a shared commitment to values that transcend borders, and the democratization of governance. A small group of governments and companies cannot be allowed to shape society through their control over AI development, nor solely through the lens of existential threats and geopolitical rivalry.

Responsible development requires systemic change, not just technical fixes. Ethics must be embedded from the outset, but we must do so through systemic change, not fear-mongering. This is not just a question of innovation; it's a matter of justice. AI should not be a tool that widens global divides or undermines democracy and social cohesion. It should be a force for empowerment, equity, and resilience. That's only possible through shared governance, transparency, and ethical alignment across all borders, including those of the most powerful players.

This is why global governance of AI is not optional, it is urgent.

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Looking to the future, what excites me most about AI is its potential to empower us, not to replace us. If we govern it well, AI could become one of our most powerful tools for addressing climate change, improving healthcare and education, and advancing equity and social cohesion. But that future is not guaranteed. It depends on the choices we make now. The future of AI is not just about building smarter machines and software, it is about working together towards a wiser humanity. One that values cooperation over competition, solidarity over supremacy. One that uses AI not to dominate, but to heal and uplift.

There is no alternative: in the long run, only responsible AI will lead to innovation that truly benefits society. Anything else will not only undermine trust and human rights but will also lead to technically weaker systems and a loss of true innovation. Irresponsible AI may promise short-term advantages, but it will cost us our long-term future.

Responsible AI is not the finish line. It is the only viable path forward.

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