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AI Governance and Global Stability: Why U.S. Leadership Matters

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ABSTRACT

The global landscape is undergoing a profound transformation driven by artificial intelligence (AI), a technology that has the potential to reshape global power dynamics, economies, and societies. The United States (U.S.) has historically played a central role in guiding technological advancements, offering leadership that has prioritized ethical governance and global stability. Drawing a parallel to the U.S. leadership during the development of atomic weapons, this study emphasizes the necessity for the U.S. to take a proactive and responsible role in the governance of AI. Without U.S. leadership, the proliferation of AI risks falling into the hands of authoritarian regimes, such as China and Russia, whose use of AI for surveillance, censorship, disinformation, and military purposes could destabilize international norms and threaten democratic values. The study uses agency theory to argue that the global community must rely on the U.S. as a responsible agent to ensure AI technologies are used ethically and for the collective benefit of humanity. The paper also incorporates social comparison theory, technological determinism, and international relations realism to further illustrate the strategic and moral imperative of U.S. leadership in AI governance. By examining the historical context of U.S. leadership in managing disruptive technologies, this study highlights the urgent need for the U.S. to establish global AI governance frameworks that prioritize human rights, equity, and democratic values, countering the risks posed by authoritarian misuse of AI. Overall, the study employs a systematic meta-analysis, utilizing agency theory and complementary frameworks such as social comparison theory, technological determinism, and realism to analyze the U.S.'s role in global AI governance, drawing from peer-reviewed literature sourced from databases like Google Scholar, PubMed, and Web of Science, published between 2010 and 2025. The analysis reveals that U.S. leadership in AI prioritizes ethical development, transparency, and international collaboration, contrasting sharply with China and Russia's authoritarian strategies focused on surveillance, militarization, and disinformation, underscoring the urgent need for U.S.-led global norms to ensure AI aligns with democratic values and fosters global stability.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), U.S. Leadership, Agency theory, Authoritarianism and AI, Ethical AI Development, Global Governance.

INTRODUCTION

The world is entering a pivotal era shaped by artificial intelligence (AI), a technology with the transformative potential to redefine global power structures, economies, and societies (Kumar et al., 2024; Mokry & Gurol, 2024). In this evolving context, the leadership role of the United States (U.S.) in AI development and governance is not only significant but essential. Historically, the U.S. has consistently assumed leadership during critical moments of technological advancement, serving as a stabilizing force and a proponent of ethical governance (Azpuru et al., 2008; Bales & Duke, 2008; Russo, 2024; Sperotto, 2014). This leadership has played a crucial role in ensuring that disruptive technologies are leveraged for the benefit of humanity as a whole, rather than being misused for domination or exploitation (Horowitz, 2018; Sinkkonen & Lassila, 2020).

A compelling historical parallel lie in the development of atomic weapons during the mid-20th century. At the time, nations such as Japan, Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union (now Russia), and later

China could have used nuclear advancements as a means to impose authoritarian dominance over the world. However, it was the U.S. that assumed the responsibility of setting the precedent for nuclear restraint, spearheading frameworks like the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and fostering international norms to prevent a catastrophic arms race (Carranza, 2006). Instead of exploiting its technological superiority for coercion, the U.S. used its leadership to create safeguards that ensured global stability and prevented other nations from weaponizing nuclear power irresponsibly (Swango, 2014).

This study uniquely integrates agency theory with social comparison theory, technological determinism, and realism to provide a multidimensional analysis of U.S. leadership in global AI governance, offering a novel framework for understanding the geopolitical and ethical dynamics of AI development. By conducting a systematic meta-analysis of AI strategies across the U.S., China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran, it reveals critical distinctions in their ethical and geopolitical implications, a comparative approach not extensively explored in prior literature. Furthermore, the study's emphasis on the U.S.'s moral and strategic obligation as a global "agent" to counter authoritarian AI misuse introduces a fresh perspective on the necessity of democratic leadership in shaping AI's transformative potential for global stability and human rights.

Today, as the world faces a similarly revolutionary shift with AI, the stakes are equally high. Other nations, most notably China and Russia, are advancing rapidly in AI research and development (Kumar et al., 2024; Mokry & Gurol, 2024). However, these countries present concerning precedents in their use of technology. China's deployment of AI for surveillance, censorship, and social control under its "Digital Authoritarianism" model poses a grave threat to democratic values and human rights (Zeng, 2022). Similarly, Russia's utilization of AI for disinformation campaigns and hybrid warfare undermines trust in democratic systems and destabilizes international norms (Bhandari & Bhandari, 2025; Johnson, 2021; Samoilenko & Suvorova, 2023). Without robust, ethical leadership, the proliferation of AI technologies risks creating a world shaped by authoritarian values, unchecked surveillance, and widespread erosion of trust.

If authoritarian nations such as China and Russia take the lead in leveraging artificial intelligence, the global consequences could be both profound and destabilizing. These regimes have a track record of using technology for coercion, control, and expansion, often prioritizing authoritarian goals over ethical considerations (Zeng, 2022). Russia's use of cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns during its invasion of Ukraine, coupled with China's aggressive expansion in the South China Sea using AI-powered surveillance and unmanned systems, highlights how such powers could deploy AI to amplify these destabilizing tactics (Anatolyevich, 2022; Feldstein, 2019). This could erode international norms, disrupt global stability, and provoke conflicts, as authoritarian regimes weaponize AI for geopolitical dominance.

Furthermore, the misuse of AI by terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) poses additional threats. These groups could employ AI to orchestrate precision attacks, amplify propaganda, and exploit vulnerabilities in government systems, leading to widespread chaos (Davis, 2021; Horowitz et al., 2022). Within authoritarian states, AI-driven tools are already eroding trust and human rights, as seen in China's surveillance systems and predictive policing (Zeng, 2022). If authoritarian powers dominate AI development, the world risks an unregulated arms race, where autonomous weaponry escalates tensions and undermines international security. This underscores the urgent need for U.S. leadership to set ethical standards, foster global alliances, and ensure that AI development aligns with democratic values to counteract these dangers (Fricke, 2020).

The study uses the agency theory framework to analyze the critical role of the U.S. in leading global artificial intelligence (AI) governance (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Agency theory provides a lens to understand the dynamics of delegation and accountability between principals (those who delegate that authority) and agents (those entrusted with decision-making authority). In this context, the global community acts as the "principal," entrusting the U.S. as the "agent" to act responsibly in guiding AI development (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Subedi, 2020; Shraddha & Rajat, 2025). As the world faces the transformative impact of AI, the principal-agent relationship is increasingly relevant in ensuring that the U.S. fulfills its responsibilities to lead with ethical standards and accountability. This framework helps highlight the moral and strategic obligation of the U.S. to act in the collective interest of humanity, aligning its AI policies with the broader goals of global stability, equity, and the protection of human

rights.

Through the lens of agency theory, the study underscores the importance of robust accountability mechanisms to ensure that the actions of the "agent" align with the expectations of the "principal." Just as organizations must monitor and incentivize their agents to minimize agency costs and prevent self-serving behavior (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), the global community must rely on U.S. leadership to uphold ethical norms and prevent misuse of AI technologies. Without such leadership, authoritarian regimes like China and Russia, acting as competing agents, may prioritize their own narrow interests, using AI for surveillance, coercion, and militarization to destabilize international peace. By applying agency theory, this study demonstrates why U.S. leadership in AI governance is not only a strategic necessity but also a moral imperative to counterbalance authoritarian misuse of technology and ensure that AI serves as a force for collective progress and global stability.

Similarly, the study incorporates other theoretical frameworks, such as social comparison theory (Suls & Wheeler, 2012), technological determinism (Dafoe, 2015), and realism in international relations (Donnelly, 2000), to make a compelling case for the necessity of U.S. leadership in artificial intelligence (AI). Social comparison theory provides insights into the competitive dynamics driving nations to assert dominance in AI development. This theory highlights how the U.S. is not only motivated by its internal goals but also pressured by the advancements of authoritarian rivals like China and Russia (Suls & Wheeler, 2012). These nations, with their focus on leveraging AI for surveillance, geopolitical control, and militarization, underscore the urgency for the U.S. to maintain its leadership in order to counterbalance the destabilizing impact of authoritarian AI models. The theory further emphasizes the importance of ethical leadership to ensure that competition in AI development does not devolve into an arms race but instead promotes global stability (Quade et al. 2019; Suls & Wheeler, 2012).

The study also integrates technological determinism, which posits that technological innovations drive societal and global change, shaping power dynamics and governance structures (Dafoe, 2015). This theory underscores the critical responsibility of the U.S. to lead AI development in a way that prioritizes democratic values, ethical governance, and the protection of human rights. By failing to lead, the U.S. risks allowing authoritarian regimes to shape global norms and technological governance in ways that undermine individual freedoms and democratic ideals. Complementing this, realism in international relations provides a framework to understand the geopolitical stakes of the AI race (Donnelly, 2000). It explains why nations like China and Russia are prioritizing AI as a tool for military and economic advantage, challenging U.S. dominance. Together, these theories reinforce the study's argument that U.S. leadership is essential not only to uphold democratic principles but also to ensure that AI is developed and governed in a way that fosters global stability and collective progress.

The significance of U.S. leadership in this context cannot be overstated. The world does not merely need a leader in AI, it needs a responsible leader with a proven track record of guiding global governance frameworks in ways that prioritize stability, equity, and human rights (Allison & Beschel, 1992; Sinkkonen & Lassila, 2020). The U.S. has been tested in moments of technological and geopolitical upheaval and has repeatedly risen to the occasion. As with nuclear weapons, AI technologies require the establishment of global norms, ethical standards, and safeguards to prevent misuse (Azpuru et al., 2008; Carranza, 2006; Diamond & Plattner, 1990; Swango, 2014). Without U.S. leadership, these critical measures risk being shaped by powers that prioritize authoritarian dominance over democratic principles.

The study argues that transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI) extends beyond mere technological advancement, it is reshaping the contours of global power, societal organization, and international stability. This transformative force, if not guided by ethical and accountable governance, risks exacerbating global inequalities and eroding democratic principles (Kreps & Kriner, 2023). The U.S., with its historical precedence in responsibly managing disruptive technologies such as nuclear weapons, is uniquely positioned to lead the world in AI development (Carranza, 2006; Swango, 2014). This leadership, however, must transcend technological innovation to encompass the establishment of global frameworks that prioritize ethical AI use, protect individual freedoms, and uphold democratic governance.

The urgency for U.S. leadership is heightened by the contrasting strategies of authoritarian nations. China's "digital authoritarianism," exemplified through its AI-powered surveillance and social control systems, and Russia's militarization of AI and use of disinformation highlight the risks of

unchecked technological misuse (Johnson, 2021; Samoilenko & Suvorova, 2023; Zeng, 2022). In this context, U.S. leadership is not simply an opportunity but a necessity to counterbalance these authoritarian approaches. The U.S. must act as an ethical agent on behalf of the global community, promoting inclusive and transparent AI policies that serve humanity as a whole. By fostering collaboration with other democracies, such as India, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and the European Union, the U.S. can establish a unified front against authoritarian misuse of AI, ensuring that this transformative technology advances collective progress and stability.

This research aims to explore the critical need for U.S. leadership in artificial intelligence, examine the dangers posed by rival powers like China and Russia, and analyze the historical precedent of U.S. global leadership in managing disruptive technologies. By understanding the importance of U.S. involvement in shaping AI governance, this study seeks to underscore why U.S. leadership is not merely an option but a necessity for safeguarding democratic values and global stability in the era of AI.

The manuscript is structured as follows: Section 2 discusses the Literature Search and Selection Process. Section 3 examines the theoretical frameworks, including agency theory and other prominent theories, to help understand the U.S.' inevitable role in AI leadership. Section 4 presents the research analysis and findings, comparing the AI strategies of the U.S. with those of China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran. Section 5 concludes the study.

Literature Search and Selection Process

To ensure a comprehensive and rigorous meta-analysis on the topic of U.S. leadership in artificial intelligence (AI), a systematic literature search and selection process was conducted. This methodology involved clearly defined search strategies, databases, and inclusion/exclusion criteria to identify relevant and credible academic sources.

Search Strategies

The literature search utilized keywords and phrases such as "U.S. leadership in artificial intelligence," "U.S. leadership in AI," "AI governance," "China and AI competition," "Russia and AI competition," "China and AI ethics," "Russia and AI ethics," "North Korea and AI ethics," "Iran and AI ethics," "AI and global security," "democra* AI," and "AI in geopolitics." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were employed to combine keywords effectively, ensuring the inclusion of studies addressing the interplay between AI leadership, ethics, and geopolitical challenges. The asterisk (*) is a placeholder for any characters that follow the root "democra." This ensures results include variations like "democratic," "democracy," "democracies," and "democratization." Advanced search techniques, including filters for publication dates (2010-2025) and language (English), were applied to ensure the relevancy and timeliness of the results.

Databases Used

A variety of academic databases were utilized to retrieve peer-reviewed articles, reports, and credible resources relevant to the topic. Google Scholar was used to provide broad access to academic literature across multiple disciplines, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of available studies. PubMed was employed to identify references specifically addressing the ethical and societal impacts of artificial intelligence (AI). ArXiv served as a resource for exploring preprints and emerging research on AI technologies, while SpringerLink offered scholarly articles and books focusing on AI policies and governance. JSTOR was utilized to gather historical and geopolitical analyses relevant to AI leadership, and Web of Science provided multidisciplinary insights on AI, ethics, and governance. Additionally, Project MUSE was accessed to explore resources related to democracy and governance, ensuring a diverse and well-rounded collection of scholarly material.

Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included based on the following criteria:

- Relevance to Topic: The study had to address U.S. leadership in AI or its competition with nations such as China and Russia.
- Publication Date: Only studies published between 2010 and 2025 were considered to ensure the analysis reflected recent advancements. Other studies, including but not limited to those by

Allison and Beschel (1992), Jensen and Meckling (1976), and Subedi (2020), were also included to highlight additional relevant points and further strengthen the arguments presented in this study.

- Peer-Reviewed: Priority was given to peer-reviewed articles to ensure academic rigor.
- Focus on Governance, Ethics, or Geopolitics: The selected studies had to contribute to understanding the implications of AI leadership on global stability and governance.
- English Language: Only English-language studies were included for consistency and accessibility.

Exclusion Criteria

The following types of studies were excluded:

- Studies unrelated to the geopolitical, ethical, or governance aspects of AI.
- Non-peer-reviewed sources, such as blog posts or opinion pieces.
- Publications focused solely on technical aspects of AI development without addressing broader implications.
- Duplicates retrieved from multiple databases.

Review Process

After retrieving the initial set of studies, a multi-stage review process was implemented:

- Title and Abstract Screening: Titles and abstracts were screened to determine relevance to the research objectives.
- Full-Text Review: Articles passing the initial screening were reviewed in full to ensure alignment with inclusion criteria.
- Data Extraction: Relevant data, including study objectives, findings, and conclusions, were extracted and categorized into themes such as AI governance, ethics, geopolitical competition, and security risks.
- Quality Assessment: Each study was evaluated for methodological rigor, relevance, and credibility before being included in the final meta-analysis.

This systematic approach ensured that the selected studies provided a robust foundation for analyzing the critical need for U.S. leadership in AI governance, highlighting the ethical and geopolitical implications of this transformative technology. Figure 1 illustrates the number of studies identified through the search process, excluding the studies that were manually added. Similarly, Table 1 presents the number of studies by journal outlets, also excluding those studies that were manually found and incorporated.

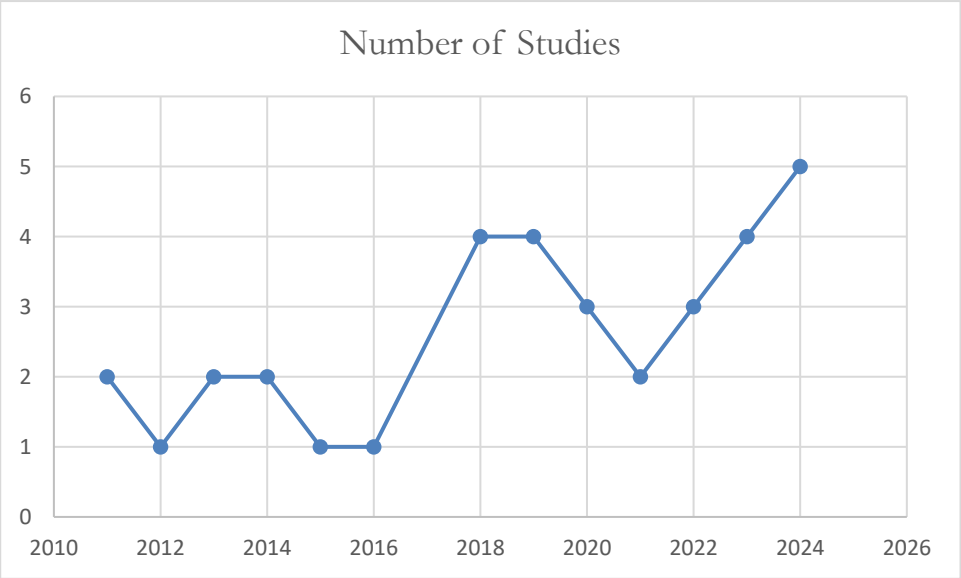

Figure 1. Publications by Year

Table 1. Journal Outlets

Journal	Count of Papers
Journal of Democracy	7
Political Science Quarterly	2
International Politics	2
Journal of Business Ethics	2
World Politics	2
Other Journals (only 1 paper for each journal)	19

Theoretical Framework

To frame the analysis of U.S. leadership in artificial intelligence (AI), several relevant theoretical models offer valuable perspectives. Among these, **agency theory** provides a particularly insightful lens through which to understand the dynamics of leadership, accountability, and governance in the development and deployment of AI (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). While traditionally applied in organizational and economic contexts, agency theory can also be adapted to analyze the geopolitical and ethical responsibilities of nations, particularly when dealing with transformative technologies like AI. This section delves into the application of agency theory in understanding the global governance and ethical imperatives of artificial intelligence (AI).

In addition, the section integrates social comparison theory and other complementary theoretical models to provide a comprehensive understanding of U.S. leadership in AI. Social comparison theory sheds light on the competitive dynamics that drive nations to assert dominance, underscoring the urgency of ethical leadership to counterbalance authoritarian models (Rizzo et al., 2021; Suls & Wheeler, 2012). The discussion further explores theories such as technological determinism, realism, constructivism, and the diffusion of innovations to contextualize AI leadership within global power dynamics (Adler, 2013; Dafoe, 2015; Dearing & Cox, 2018; Donnelly, 2000; Hopf, 1998). The section concludes with frameworks like balance of power theory (Nexon, 2009; Paul et al., 2004), game theory (Owen, 1982; Rubinstein, 1991), social contract theory (Jos, 2006; Ritchie, 1981), and democratic peace theory (Gat, 2005; Parmar, 2013), which collectively emphasize the importance of U.S. leadership in fostering global stability, promoting democratic values, and preventing the misuse of AI technologies by authoritarian regimes. This multidimensional analysis illustrates the critical need for the U.S. to lead in setting ethical AI standards and ensuring the responsible use of this transformative technology.

Agency Theory in the Context of AI Governance

Agency theory, originally developed by Michael C. Jensen and William H. Meckling in their seminal 1976 paper, provides a framework for understanding the relationship between principals and agents, particularly in the context of delegation and accountability (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; Li-Kuehne et al., 2024; Mwaungulu et al., 2023; Subedi, 2020; Subedi, 2023). Their seminal work explored how conflicts of interest arise when agents (those entrusted with decision-making authority) prioritize their own objectives over the interests of principals (those who delegate that authority). Their study also highlighted the costs, referred to as "agency costs" associated with monitoring and incentivizing agents to align their actions with the principal's goals. While their research was initially applied to corporate governance and organizational structures, its principles can be extended to global governance and AI leadership.

In the context of AI, the U.S. can be viewed as an "agent" acting on behalf of the global community (the "principal") to lead the ethical development and deployment of this transformative technology. Just as effective corporate governance requires accountability mechanisms to ensure that agents act in the best interests of shareholders, international governance necessitates that the U.S. adopts transparent, ethical, and inclusive AI policies that benefit humanity as a whole. Without such leadership, authoritarian regimes like China and Russia, acting as competing agents, may prioritize their own narrow interests, misusing AI for surveillance, coercion, and militarization, to the detriment of global stability. By drawing on the principles of agency theory, U.S. leadership in AI can be framed as not only a strategic imperative but also a moral responsibility to act in the collective interest of the global community.

Agency Theory and Leadership Accountability

Agency theory also emphasizes the role of accountability mechanisms in aligning the actions of agents with the goals of principals (Mwaungulu et al., 2023; Subedi, 2020). For AI governance, this translates to the need for robust frameworks, such as international treaties, ethical guidelines, and multilateral agreements, that hold leading nations accountable for their actions. The U.S.' historical role in guiding the development of global norms for technologies such as nuclear weapons provides a precedent for how agency theory can inform leadership accountability (Carranza, 2006; Resick, 2011; Swango, 2014). By promoting transparency and ethical standards in AI, the U.S. can address the agency problem by ensuring that its leadership aligns with the global community's broader goals of stability, human rights, and equitable technological progress.

Social Comparison Theory in Relation to Agency

While agency theory focuses on accountability, **social comparison theory** provides insights into the competitive dynamics that drive nations to assert dominance in AI development. Social comparison theory suggests that individuals or entities evaluate themselves relative to others, often striving to outperform perceived competitors (Rizzo et al., 2021; Suls & Wheeler, 2012). In the context of AI, this dynamic is evident in the technological race among nations, particularly between democratic and authoritarian regimes. The U.S.' leadership is shaped not only by its internal motivations but also by external pressures to outperform rivals like China and Russia. This comparative drive underscores the urgency for ethical leadership, as the unchecked pursuit of technological superiority could exacerbate global instability and conflict.

Theoretical Implications for U.S. Leadership

By combining agency theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) and social comparison theory (Suls & Wheeler, 2012), a nuanced understanding of U.S. leadership in AI emerges. Agency theory highlights the ethical and governance responsibilities of leading nations, emphasizing the importance of aligning national actions with global welfare. At the same time, social comparison theory explains the competitive dynamics that necessitate U.S. leadership to counterbalance authoritarian models of AI governance. Together, these theories illustrate why the U.S. must act as a responsible agent, leveraging its position to foster global collaboration, set ethical standards, and ensure that AI development aligns with democratic values and the collective good of humanity.

Other theories in the Context of AI Governance

Technological Determinism: Technological determinism posits that technological innovation drives societal and cultural change, often shaping the trajectory of history (Dafoe, 2015; Bhandari, 2025b). In the context of artificial intelligence (AI), this theory suggests that nations leading in AI development will inevitably influence global power dynamics, norms, and governance structures. This underscores the critical responsibility of the U.S. to lead AI development in a way that prioritizes ethical governance and democratic values. Technology is not neutral, it reflects the values of its creators and governors. Therefore, the failure of democratic nations to assert leadership could enable authoritarian regimes to set global norms that align with their values, potentially leading to the erosion of human rights and democratic freedoms worldwide.

Realism in International Relations: Realism emphasizes the competitive and self-interested nature of states in the international system, where power and security are central to decision-making (Donnelly, 2000). This theory provides a framework for understanding the AI race as a struggle for global dominance, with nations leveraging AI to secure strategic advantages. It explains why nations such as China and Russia prioritize AI for military and geopolitical power, viewing it as a tool to challenge U.S. dominance. Realism also reinforces the need for the U.S. to maintain leadership in AI to safeguard its national security and sustain its influence in an increasingly multipolar world. Without such leadership, democratic values could be overshadowed by authoritarian models of governance.

Constructivism in International Relations: Constructivism focuses on the role of ideas, norms, and identities in shaping the behavior of states and the international system (Adler, 2013). Unlike realism, constructivism emphasizes the importance of shared values and the power of collective norms (Hopf, 1998). In the context of AI, constructivism provides a valuable lens for understanding how the U.S. can

leverage its leadership to establish global norms for ethical AI development rooted in democratic principles and human rights. This theory suggests that U.S. leadership is not just about achieving technological superiority but also about shaping the global narrative around responsible AI governance. By promoting a framework of shared values, the U.S. can create a more cooperative international approach to AI development.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory: The diffusion of innovations theory explains how new ideas and technologies spread through societies or systems (Dearing & Cox, 2018). The adoption of innovations depends on factors such as the relative advantage of the technology, its compatibility with existing values, and the role of opinion leaders (Xiong et al., 2016). In the case of AI, the U.S. can act as a global "opinion leader" by setting ethical standards and demonstrating the benefits of responsible AI development. By showcasing how AI can be aligned with democratic values, the U.S. can encourage the adoption of its norms globally. This leadership is particularly critical in developing nations that may be vulnerable to the influence of authoritarian models, such as those promoted by China.

Balance of Power Theory: The balance of power theory posits that nations work to prevent any single state from achieving overwhelming dominance, often through alliances or rivalries (Paul et al., 2004). This theory is particularly relevant in the context of U.S. leadership in AI, which can be viewed as a balancing act against the growing influence of authoritarian powers like China and Russia (Nexon, 2009). Through strategic alliances with other democracies, the U.S. can counteract the dominance of authoritarian AI models and ensure a multipolar yet stable global order. U.S. leadership in fostering a balanced AI landscape can help preserve international stability and prevent authoritarian regimes from gaining disproportionate technological and geopolitical control.

Game Theory: Game theory analyzes strategic interactions where the outcome depends on the decisions of multiple actors (Owen, 1982; Rubinstein, 1991). It is particularly relevant to understanding the competitive environment of the AI arms race (Guth, 1988). Game theory can explain the strategic decisions nations face, such as whether to pursue unilateral AI development or cooperate with other countries to mitigate risks. For instance, the U.S. must weigh the benefits of leading alone versus building multilateral agreements to establish ethical AI norms. Game theory also underscores the importance of trust-building and reducing uncertainty, which can be achieved through transparent governance and international collaboration.

Social Contract Theory: Social contract theory argues that individuals or entities consent to governance structures in exchange for security and order (Jos, 2006; Ritchie, 1981). In the globalized context of AI governance, this theory can extend to international agreements that ensure AI is developed and deployed responsibly. The U.S. can play a critical role in leading efforts to establish a "social contract" for AI governance, where nations agree to follow rules and norms that prioritize global stability, human rights, and the collective good. This approach would ensure that AI development aligns with democratic principles rather than unilateral or authoritarian ambitions, fostering a cooperative and secure international AI ecosystem.

Democratic Peace Theory: Democratic peace theory posits that democracies are less likely to engage in conflict with one another, as shared values and institutional frameworks promote cooperation (Gat, 2005; Parmar, 2013). U.S. leadership in AI can reinforce this theory by fostering collaboration among democracies to counterbalance the rise of authoritarian powers. By leading efforts to establish shared governance frameworks for AI, the U.S. can strengthen alliances with other democracies and create a united front against the misuse of AI for authoritarian purposes. This cooperative approach not only preserves democratic peace but also ensures that AI development reflects and upholds democratic ideals globally.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section provides a detailed analysis of the dangers associated with authoritarian nations, such as China, Russia, Iran and North Korea, leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) for their geopolitical agendas (Kumar et al., 2024; Mokry & Gurol, 2024). It begins by highlighting the potential destabilizing consequences when ethical considerations are absent in the development of cutting-edge technologies. The section underscores how authoritarian regimes prioritize state control and expansion over democratic principles, using AI for surveillance, coercion, and militarization. Examples include Russia's cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns during the Ukraine invasion and China's use of AI-powered

surveillance systems in the South China Sea (Anatolyevich, 2022; Feldstein, 2019). Additionally, the risks posed by terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS exploiting AI for precision attacks and propaganda are discussed (Davis, 2021; Horowitz et al., 2022). These examples reveal how unchecked authoritarian use of AI can erode global norms, human rights, and international trust.

The section also compares the AI strategies of the U.S., China, and Russia, revealing stark contrasts in their priorities and ethical approaches. The U.S. emphasizes ethical AI development and transparency, championing global stability through multilateral cooperation and governance frameworks. In contrast, China uses AI for digital authoritarianism, exporting surveillance technologies to extend its influence (Zeng, 2022), while Russia focuses on militarization and disinformation (Johnson, 2021; Samoilenko & Suvorova, 2023). The ethical implications of these strategies highlight the urgency for U.S. leadership to establish global norms, counterbalance authoritarian models, and foster democratic values in AI governance. Ultimately, the section concludes that U.S. leadership is essential not only to safeguard human rights but also to ensure AI remains a tool for collective progress rather than oppression and conflict.

The Dangers of Authoritarian Leadership in AI Development

If authoritarian nations such as China and Russia become the first to fully leverage artificial intelligence, the consequences for global stability could be profound and destabilizing (Davis, 2021). The history of recent conflicts and authoritarian strategies serves as a stark reminder of the potential misuse of cutting-edge technology when ethical considerations are absent (Sims, 2018). Artificial intelligence, when wielded by regimes that prioritize domination, control, and expansion over democratic values and human rights, becomes a weapon capable of destabilizing entire regions and undermining global peace (Johnson, 2021; Samoilenko & Suvorova, 2023; Zeng, 2022).

Global Destabilization

Authoritarian nations like Russia and China have already demonstrated their willingness to exploit technological advancements for coercion and geopolitical dominance (Ashmore, 2009; Horowitz et al., 2022; Zeng, 2022). Russia's invasion of Ukraine serves as a clear example of how authoritarian regimes use advanced technologies to further their ambitions. Russia has deployed cyberattacks, misinformation campaigns, and hybrid warfare tactics, leveraging technologies to destabilize Ukraine's infrastructure, disrupt global narratives, and spread confusion among allies (Willett, 2023). If such powers gain the upper hand in AI, they could exponentially enhance these destabilizing tactics. AI-powered autonomous systems, disinformation bots, and cyberwarfare tools (e.g., Bhandari & Bhandari, 2025; Bhandari 2025a) could be deployed on a scale that overwhelms global efforts to maintain peace and democracy.

Similarly, China's expansionist activities in the South China Sea illustrate how an authoritarian nation can exploit emerging technologies to cement its control over contested regions. Using AI-powered surveillance systems, unmanned drones, and data analytics, China has built artificial islands and fortified them with military installations to assert dominance over maritime trade routes critical to global commerce (Alessio & Renfro, 2022; Fravel, 2011). Such actions challenge the sovereignty of neighboring nations, destabilize regional security, and erode international norms of cooperation (Alessio & Renfro, 2022; Zeng, 2022). Should China gain a technological edge in AI compared to the U.S., its ability to project power and enforce territorial claims without regard for international law could escalate tensions and provoke armed conflict.

AI in the Hands of Terrorist Organizations

Beyond the ambitions of nation-states, the dangers of AI being misused by terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS are equally alarming (Davis, 2021; Horowitz et al., 2022). These groups have historically exploited technology to further their agendas, from using social media for recruitment to employing encryption tools to evade surveillance. With access to advanced AI systems, these groups could weaponize autonomous drones for precision attacks, amplify their propaganda through AI-generated content, and coordinate decentralized operations with greater efficiency. AI's ability to analyze vast amounts of data and predict vulnerabilities could allow terrorist groups to launch more sophisticated and devastating attacks, destabilizing governments and sowing chaos globally.

Erosion of Trust and Human Rights

Authoritarian governments, with their lack of accountability, could also leverage AI to erode individual freedoms and suppress dissent. China's implementation of AI-driven surveillance systems, such as facial recognition and predictive policing, exemplifies how these tools can be used to monitor and control populations (Qiang, 2019; Zeng, 2022). The same AI technologies that enable economic growth and public safety in democracies are weaponized in authoritarian regimes to silence opposition, manipulate public opinion, and entrench authoritarian rule. The proliferation of such models globally could inspire other authoritarian governments to adopt similar systems, leading to a widespread erosion of human rights.

Unregulated Arms Race

If authoritarian nations are the first to dominate AI, the lack of ethical safeguards could trigger an unregulated arms race (Roff, 2019). Nations may feel compelled to develop AI weaponry to defend against potential threats, leading to an escalating spiral of militarization. The introduction of autonomous weapons systems without robust international governance could result in unintended consequences, such as accidental conflicts or the inability to de-escalate hostilities once they begin. This would create a world where trust is eroded, and mutual suspicion dominates international relations.

Comparing the AI Strategies of the US, China, and Russia

The artificial intelligence (AI) strategies of the U.S., China, and Russia reflect their differing political ideologies, governance models, and global aspirations. Each country approaches AI development with distinct priorities that have significant ethical implications and consequences for global stability. While the U.S. emphasizes transparency, ethical governance, and innovation in alignment with democratic principles, China and Russia adopt strategies that prioritize state control, geopolitical dominance, and authoritarian objectives.

U.S.: Ethical Leadership and Innovation

The U.S.' AI strategy focuses on fostering innovation while maintaining a strong emphasis on ethics and transparency (Mokry & Gurol, 2024). The U.S. prioritizes partnerships between the government, private sector, and academia to advance AI capabilities (Cath et al., 2018). A hallmark of its strategy is the commitment to democratic values, such as accountability, privacy, and individual rights, which are embedded in its AI governance frameworks. Initiatives like the National Artificial Intelligence Initiative Act of 2020 and the Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights underscore the U.S.'s effort to establish ethical AI standards and ensure AI development aligns with societal values. Moreover, the U.S. actively advocates for international cooperation and global norms in AI governance, seeking to counterbalance authoritarian approaches by promoting open and fair use of AI (Scott & Steele, 2011). This leadership approach aims to prevent misuse while fostering global stability through collaboration with like-minded democracies.

China: Authoritarian Innovation and Digital Control

China's AI strategy, in contrast, is deeply intertwined with its authoritarian governance model and ambition to become a global superpower in technology. Through its "Next Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan" launched in 2017, China aims to lead the world in AI by 2030 (Ashmore, 2009; Wu et al., 2020). Central to its strategy is the integration of AI into surveillance systems and social control mechanisms, including its Social Credit System and advanced facial recognition technologies (Zeng, 2022). These applications exemplify "digital authoritarianism," where AI is used to monitor, influence, and suppress dissent, posing a significant ethical challenge. Internationally, China exports its AI technologies to other authoritarian regimes, thereby normalizing state surveillance and undermining democratic values. China's aggressive pursuit of AI superiority raises concerns about a potential imbalance in global power dynamics, where nations adopting China's AI technologies might align with its authoritarian model, destabilizing democratic governance globally.

Russia: Militarization and Disinformation

Russia's AI strategy centers on leveraging AI for military and geopolitical advantage (Johnson, 2021; Samoilenko & Suvorova, 2023). The country focuses heavily on developing AI-enabled weapons systems, cyber capabilities, and disinformation campaigns to enhance its influence on the global stage. Russian military strategies emphasize the use of autonomous systems for warfare and surveillance, often bypassing ethical considerations in the rush to achieve operational effectiveness. Additionally, Russia's use of AI-driven disinformation tools during geopolitical conflicts, such as the Ukraine invasion, illustrates its willingness to exploit AI to destabilize rival nations and manipulate public opinion (Willett, 2023). These actions not only erode trust in democratic systems but also create an environment of global instability, as other nations are compelled to develop countermeasures, potentially escalating an AI arms race.

Iran and North Korea: Weaponized AI and Regional Influence

Although Iran and North Korea have not made technological strides comparable to global AI leaders like the U.S., China, and Russia, their AI strategies remain deeply concerning due to their focus on weaponization and regional destabilization. Both nations have sought to leverage AI technology to amplify their military capabilities, enhance surveillance, and pursue geopolitical objectives that often contradict international norms.

North Korea, for example, has prioritized AI development in areas such as cyber hacking and missile technology. Its AI-driven cyber capabilities have been linked to high-profile hacking operations targeting global financial institutions and critical infrastructure, providing the regime with economic resources while simultaneously destabilizing global systems (Pashentsev, 2023). Similarly, Iran has utilized AI to strengthen its asymmetric warfare capabilities, such as deploying AI-enabled drones in regional conflict zones like Yemen and Syria, and using AI-driven surveillance tools to suppress domestic dissent (Plichta & Rossiter, 2024).). These efforts highlight how both nations are harnessing AI to bolster their authoritarian control at home while projecting military and technological influence abroad.

Ethical Implications

The differing AI strategies of these nations have profound ethical implications (Mokry & Gurol, 2024). The U.S. promotes responsible AI development through frameworks that prioritize human rights, privacy, and transparency, which serve as a model for global governance. In contrast, China and Russia's strategies highlight the dangers of AI misuse, where authoritarian control and militarization take precedence over ethical considerations. China's widespread deployment of AI for surveillance erodes individual freedoms and human dignity, while Russia's focus on disinformation and militarization exacerbates geopolitical tensions. Iran and North Korea also pose strong threat to surrounding countries and promotes international piracy. Without strong global norms and leadership to regulate AI, the unchecked expansion of these authoritarian models threatens to reshape global power structures and undermine international stability.

Global Stability

The U.S., China, and Russia's AI strategies collectively influence global stability, but their divergence in priorities presents risks. U.S. leadership is critical in fostering international collaboration to create ethical standards and prevent the misuse of AI. However, the competitive strategies of China and Russia introduce uncertainty and instability, as their focus on surveillance, coercion, and militarization undermines trust and accelerates the AI arms race. To maintain global stability, the U.S. must act as a counterbalance, promoting democratic norms and establishing multilateral agreements that ensure AI development aligns with principles of equity, transparency, and collective security.

The Role of U.S. Leadership

The U.S., China, Russia, Iran and North Korea each embody distinct approaches to AI development that reflect their political ideologies and global aspirations. While the U.S. champions ethical and collaborative leadership, China, Russia, Iran and North Korea focus on authoritarian innovation and militarization, posing significant risks to global stability. U.S. leadership remains essential in navigating these challenges to ensure AI serves as a tool for progress rather than division and conflict.

U.S. leadership is essential not only to mitigate these risks posed by authoritarian nations but also to ensure that AI development aligns with democratic values, transparency, and global stability. By fostering alliances, setting ethical standards, and investing in AI governance, the U.S. can act as a counterbalance to authoritarian misuse of AI. Without such leadership, the world risks descending into a chaotic future where AI becomes a tool for oppression, conflict, and global destabilization rather than a force for collective progress.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that it is essential for countries with democratic values, such as India, the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea, and groups like the European Union, to support U.S. leadership in AI governance. This support is not just beneficial but necessary. The U.S. has demonstrated its capacity to lead ethically and responsibly, ensuring that technological advancements align with values such as equity, privacy, and human dignity. A striking historical parallel can be drawn from the development of atomic weapons in the mid-20th century, when countries like Japan, Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union (now Russia), and later China could have exploited nuclear advancements for authoritarian dominance. Had these nations gained nuclear capabilities before the U.S., they likely would have used this power to expand territories, intimidate neighbors, and impose authoritarian agendas globally. By championing initiatives like the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and promoting international norms, the U.S. set a precedent for responsible stewardship of transformative technologies, averting a catastrophic global arms race (Carranza, 2006; Swango, 2014). This study employs the agency theory framework to analyze the U.S.'s role in global artificial intelligence (AI) governance (Jensen & Meckling, 1976), providing a lens to understand the dynamics of delegation and accountability between principals (those who entrust authority) and agents (those who act on their behalf). The U.S., as the agent, has a moral and strategic obligation to foster trust and ensure AI is developed for humanity's collective good, preventing misuse by authoritarian "agents" like China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea.

The analysis of AI strategies employed by the U.S., China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran reveals a stark contrast in priorities and implications for global stability. The U.S. champions ethical AI development, prioritizing transparency, accountability, and human rights (Cath et al., 2018; Mokry & Gurol, 2024), while fostering international collaboration to establish global norms. In contrast, China and Russia leverage AI for authoritarian control, geopolitical dominance, and militarization, posing significant threats to democratic values, individual freedoms, and international security (Ashmore, 2009; Johnson, 2021; Samoilenko & Suvorova, 2023; Wu et al., 2020; Zeng, 2022). While Iran and North Korea lag behind in AI advancements, their focus on weaponization and regional destabilization remains concerning. Democratic nations must rally behind U.S. initiatives to create global AI governance frameworks, sharing expertise to counter authoritarian models and demonstrate how democracies can harness AI for the greater good. Through multilateral agreements enforcing ethical AI development, equitable benefit distribution, and prevention of AI misuse, democratic nations can foster global trust via transparent policies, data privacy protections, and measures to curb AI weaponization, ultimately steering the world toward stability and prosperity.

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