

THE FUTURE OF AI POLICIES IN THE US AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TÜRKİYE

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- What are Trump and Harris' positions on AI?
- How might each of their policies influence the United States' role in AI development and regulation on the international stage?
- How Should Türkiye Respond to Respective Policies

INTRODUCTION

In November 2024, Americans will elect a new President, a decision that will shape American domestic and international affairs until 2028 and beyond with serious implications for the future of artificial intelligence (AI) policies. With President Biden having withdrawn from the race, the contest will now play out between two candidates: the former President Donald Trump and the current Vice President Kamala Harris. The election result is likely to impact the US policy on emerging technologies. It will have specific consequences for the regulation of AI that can have implications for domains ranging from national security to commercial development among others.

This election occurs during a pivotal period of rapid advancements in AI where discussions extend beyond its benefits to address its potential negative impacts on daily life as well as the international sys-

tem. Pressing questions about privacy, security, ethics, and the government's role in regulating these transformative technologies have become increasingly prominent. Furthermore, given that the current technological revolution is primarily driven by the private sector, there is increasing scrutiny regarding its role and impact on the development of responsible AI. This has positioned big tech firms and venture capitalists at the forefront of the presidential debates.

The two presidential candidates offer differing visions for AI governance in the US; as a result, the election will likely play a crucial role in shaping the future of American leadership in AI. Potential outcomes will have significant implications at both the national and global stages, as the US stance on AI will shape international norms and practices in the context of its ongoing rivalry with China in advanced technologies. AI raises important challenges for national security as

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well as the future of the economy in developed and developing nations. From the American perspective, the leading role in AI must remain with the US and the winner of this race will also win the global leadership in an increasingly multipolar world. Yet, US leaders have differing visions about how to achieve this goal.

In this context, we aim to provide an overview of each presidential candidate's position on AI and an evaluation of their policy proposals. By exploring how their policies might influence the US' role in AI development and regulation, we try to highlight how the race for leadership in AI development might play out at the international stage and impact middle powers such as Türkiye. We examine how Türkiye might respond to the policies of each candidate considering the deep and wide impact of AI development. While the US and China are at the forefront of AI research and development as well as various applications, Türkiye is also impacted by the new economic forces and national security implications unleashed by AI.

EXPECTATIONS FROM TRUMP'S AI POLICIES

During his presidency, Donald Trump initiated a series of policies that laid the groundwork for his approach to AI and emerging technologies. In 2019, Trump signed the first ever Executive Order (EO) about AI titled, "Maintaining American Leadership in Artificial Intelligence."¹ This EO was aimed at maintaining American leadership in AI, marking the first significant federal initiative. The order directed federal agencies to prioritize research and development in AI and to safeguard civil liberties, American values, and the American workforce. The Trump administration's overarching strategy was characterized by a light regulatory touch focused mainly on boosting R&D and encouraging federal agencies to explore opportunities for collaboration with the private sector. As a result, Trump's EO allowed the tech industry significant freedom to innovate and compete on the global stage.

¹ "Maintaining American Leadership in Artificial Intelligence," *Federal Register*, (February 14, 2019), retrieved September 6, 2024, from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2019-02-14/pdf/2019-02544.pdf>.

Just one year later, at the end of his administration, Trump also signed the Executive Order 13960 titled, "Promoting the Use of Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence in the Federal Government."² While this executive order marked a significant step in promoting responsible AI implementation across federal agencies by emphasizing ethics and public confidence, it primarily focused on the use of AI within the federal government without specifically addressing the private sector. Nevertheless, the executive order laid the groundwork for future AI-related policies and regulations.

In the 2024 election season, the Trump campaign promises to repeal President Biden's executive order on AI. Trump and his supporters argue that this order hinders technological advancement by imposing "radical left-wing ideas." Specifically, the Republican Party Platform for the 2024 presidential elections states, "We will repeal Joe Biden's dangerous Executive Order that hinders AI Innovation, and imposes Radical Left-wing ideas on the development of this technology. In its place, Republicans support AI Development rooted in Free Speech and Human Flourishing."³

While Trump intends to cancel the Biden EO on AI, it is still not clear which parts of it will be changed, raising more questions. President Biden's Executive Order on Artificial Intelligence, signed in October 2023, represents a significant expansion of the U.S. government's approach to AI governance, building on earlier efforts such as Trump's 2020 executive order. According to several experts, there is still a possibility that after Trump cancels the Biden order, he can make just a few changes to it and sign a new Trump EO which would be quite similar to the existing one.⁴

² "Promoting the Use of Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence in the Federal Government," *Federal Register*, (December 3, 2020), retrieved September 6, 2024, from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-12-08/pdf/2020-27065.pdf>.

³ "2024 GOP Platform Make America Great Again!," (July 7, 2024), retrieved September 6, 2024, from <https://cdn.nucleusfiles.com/be/beb1a388-1d88-4389-a67d-c1e2d7f8bedf/2024-gop-platform-july-7-final.pdf>.

⁴ Gregory C. Allen and H. Andrew Schwartz, "How Are the Harris and Trump Campaigns Thinking about AI Policy?" Center for Strategic & International Studies, (July 29, 2024), retrieved September 6, 2024, from <https://www.csis.org/podcasts/ai-policy-podcast/how-are-harris-and-trump-campaigns-thinking-about-ai-policy>.

Yet, there is also the possibility that Trump may implement more significant changes, a prospect supported by several venture capitalists (VC) and leaders of major tech companies. According to a report by *The Washington Post*, Trump's tech allies are believed to be working on a new framework aimed at advancing AI military technology while easing regulations compared to those in place during the Biden administration.⁵ This plan, known also as "Make America First in AI," is expected to appeal to Silicon Valley investors. The report suggests that, unlike the current federal agencies that oversee AI model development, a second Trump administration would establish "industry-led" agencies to evaluate AI models and protect them from foreign competitors.

It is important to note that Trump's supporters in Silicon Valley have generally emphasized the necessity of advancing AI military developments, citing the growing threat posed by China. This aligns with Trump's tough stance on China, a justification commonly used by his advocates.⁶ It should still be noted that this is in line with US defense policy shifts in recent years that have prioritized AI as a key component of military strategy through initiatives such as the Pentagon's Joint Artificial Intelligence Center (JAIC) which later in 2022 was integrated into the Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office.⁷

Trump's selection of JD Vance as his vice-presidential candidate has further garnered support from some in the tech sector. Vance, a Silicon Valley insider, has strong ties to influential tech leaders like Peter Thiel, which has bolstered Trump's appeal among this group. In this context, Trump's approach

to AI has strengthened his connections with several prominent venture capitalists and tech leaders, including Marc Andreessen, Ben Horowitz, Elon Musk, and Joe Lonsdale among others. In terms of funding, Trump has secured approximately \$21 million from big tech companies. Of this amount, \$12 million came from donations made during RemedyFest, and an additional \$8.7 million was raised by America PAC.⁸

Within this framework, a potential second Trump administration is likely to prioritize deregulation and a market-driven approach to innovation. This strategy aligns with Trump's broader economic philosophy of reducing government intervention and promoting an AI ecosystem led by the private sector. Additionally, with a rhetoric focused mainly on the Chinese threat and a perspective of win-lose foreign policy, Trump is expected to focus heavily on the military applications of AI, pushing for increases in the federal budget allocations to promote America's technological dominance on the global stage.

Furthermore, during his presidency, Trump's foreign policy was primarily characterized by a unilateral approach, with a strong emphasis on the "America First" doctrine. This strategy often meant prioritizing US interests over traditional alliances and international cooperation, sidelining long-standing allies in favor of direct, often transactional relationships with other nations. It is likely that a second Trump administration would adopt a similar foreign policy, which would extend to AI policies. By downplaying regulations and collaboration with allies, Trump would likely advocate for AI applications that serve US interests across all sectors—economic, social, political, and military—without necessarily considering the broader international implications or the need for global standards and multilateral agreements.

5 Cat Zakrzewski, "Trump Allies Draft AI Order to Launch 'Manhattan Projects' for Defense," *The Washington Post*, (July 16, 2024), retrieved September 6, 2024, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/07/16/trump-ai-executive-order-regulations-military/>.

6 "The Little Tech Agenda: Why We Support Trump," *Youtube*, retrieved September 6, 2024, from https://youtu.be/n_sNclEgQQZQ.

7 Terri Moon Cronk, "Joint Artificial Intelligence Center Has Substantially Grown to Aid the Warfighter," *U.S. Department of Defense*, (November 18, 2020), retrieved September 6, 2024, from <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2418970/joint-artificial-intelligence-center-has-substantially-grown-to-aid-the-warfighter/>.

8 Alexandra Ulmer, "Trump Rakes in \$12 Million at Tech Fundraiser in Liberal San Francisco," *Reuters*, (June 7, 2024), retrieved September 6, 2024, from <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-liberal-san-francisco-high-dollar-tech-fundraiser-2024-06-06/>.

EXPECTATIONS FROM HARRIS' AI POLICIES

Kamala Harris has played a pivotal role in shaping and advocating for the Biden administration's AI policies, which are characterized by a commitment to balancing innovation with public safety and ethical considerations. She has not only articulated the administration's vision for AI on the global stage, notably during her prominent address at the Global Summit on AI Safety in the UK, but also been instrumental in crafting many of these policies.⁹ Harris has been instrumental in establishing AI regulations, including the creation of the United States AI Safety Institute, drafting policy guidance for government use of AI, and developing the AI Bill of Rights.

Shortly after the release of ChatGPT, Harris recognized the significance of emerging AI models and convened a meeting at the White House with major tech companies, including Google and Microsoft.¹⁰ Within months, several of these companies voluntarily committed to White House regulations designed to protect the rights and safety of the public from potential AI risks.¹¹ It is important to note that Harris's background—growing up and working in the San Francisco Bay Area and serving as California's attorney general—fostered close relationships with the Silicon Valley tech community. This connection enabled her to bring these companies together at the White House and will likely enable her to advance AI policies that prioritize human interests.

9 "FACT SHEET: Vice President Harris Announces New U.S. Initiatives to Advance the Safe and Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence," *The White House*, (November 1, 2023), retrieved September 6, 2024, from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/11/01/fact-sheet-vice-president-harris-announces-new-u-s-initiatives-to-advance-the-safe-and-responsible-use-of-artificial-intelligence/>.

10 "Statement from Vice President Harris After Meeting with CEOs on Advancing Responsible Artificial Intelligence Innovation," *The White House*, (May 4, 2023), retrieved September 6, 2024, from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/04/statement-from-vice-president-harris-after-meeting-with-ceos-on-advancing-responsible-artificial-intelligence-innovation/>.

11 Matt O'Brien and Zeke Miller, "Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft and Other Tech Firms Agree to AI Safeguards set by the White House," *AP-NEWS*, (July 21, 2023), retrieved September 6, 2024, from <https://apnews.com/article/artificial-intelligence-safeguards-joe-biden-kamala-harris-4caf02b94275429f764b06840897436c>.

With that said, a potential Harris administration is expected to maintain the Biden administration's focus on regulation and oversight. Unlike Trump's approach, Harris's stance underscores the belief that the government plays a vital role in regulating technology to ensure it benefits the public. As president, she would likely push for comprehensive legislation to establish clear standards for AI safety and security. There is already some consensus around building safe AI and this will probably not differ too much between a Harris or Trump administration. However, Trump's commitment to economic deregulation and innovation is likely to lessen the emphasis on building a robust regulatory environment.

It is important to highlight another key difference from Trump: Harris's foreign policy, like Biden's, emphasizes collaboration and cooperation with allies, a stance likely to be reflected in her approach to AI policies. Harris has already shown a strong commitment to working with international partners to establish common norms and standards for AI governance. This commitment was exemplified by the formal partnership between the UK and US AI Safety Institutes, finalized shortly after her speech in the UK.¹² In the broader context of seeking cooperative economic relations with China, a Harris administration might seek closer conversation with America's main competitor in AI.¹³

Lastly, it's important to recognize that while California is typically a Democratic stronghold, there has been growing discontent with Biden in recent years. This discontent has led some tech leaders to shift their support toward Trump or remain neutral, raising concerns for Democrats about the upcoming elections.

12 "US and UK Announce Formal Partnership on Artificial Intelligence Safety," *The Guardian*, (April 2, 2024), retrieved September 6, 2024, from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2024/apr/02/us-uk-artificial-intelligence-partnership>.

13 It is important to highlight that in May 2024, China and the United States convened their first intergovernmental meeting to address the potential existential risks posed by emerging artificial intelligence technologies. This meeting was a direct outcome of the Xi-Biden presidential discussions during the November 2023 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit, where both leaders agreed to initiate a dialogue on the opportunities and challenges associated with AI.

In response, Harris visited San Francisco, where she engaged with the tech community and successfully raised \$13 million—a significant achievement, especially considering that Biden struggled to secure financial backing from the San Francisco Bay Area during the 2020 election, with only a few billionaires contributing to his campaign.

Harris, on the other hand, has generated considerable excitement in the Bay Area, even though she supports the continuation of AI regulations. She frequently emphasizes that innovation remains a vital element and regulations should not hinder technological advancements while asserting that public safety and innovation aren't mutually exclusive. Therefore, if Harris were elected President, it wouldn't necessarily mean she would impose stricter regulations that stifle innovation or oppose AI's use in the military. The risk of falling behind in the AI race, especially with China advancing rapidly, is too significant for the U.S. Harris is likely to support AI innovation and its applications across various sectors, including the military, while trying to implement stronger regulations on AI development.

Kamala Harris' approach to AI policy reflects a careful balance between fostering innovation and ensuring public safety, with a strong emphasis on regulation and international cooperation. Her deep connections with the tech community and commitment to ethical AI development suggest that, as president, she would continue to support AI advancements while advocating for responsible oversight to protect societal interests. However, this seemingly balanced approach may not be sufficient for some tech leaders who advocate for as little oversight as possible in the technology space. They see the government as a major actor stifling innovation and argue for self-regulation of the industry. At the same time, it would be safe to argue that either leader will need to reckon with the time pressure emanating from the AI leadership race with China by sticking to a light touch approach in shaping the regulatory environment.

WHAT SHOULD TÜRKİYE DO?

The US approach to AI development under a potential Trump administration may lead to a more fragmented global landscape limiting international cooperation; however, this might pressure other technologically capable states, such as Türkiye, to focus on increasing their own capabilities by prioritizing self-reliance and national capacity. In an era of intensified competition in the international order, Türkiye should strategically position itself by focusing on AI innovation and elevated investments, particularly in defense and military applications. This would not only enhance national security but also position Türkiye as a significant player in AI-driven defense capabilities that would spur growth in the private sector.

Türkiye has been placing more emphasis on the advancement of its own AI capabilities while also ensuring robust domestic regulations to manage the ethical and societal impacts of AI. Türkiye should also invest in building a self-reliant AI ecosystem that could promote growth in public and private sectors. This includes fostering partnerships with domestic tech companies as well as startups to drive AI development and innovation. As the US-China competition in AI intensifies, many countries like Türkiye will be able to find niche areas that could make strategic impact in the medium and long terms.

In an international landscape where leadership for AI cooperation and regulation is contentious, Türkiye could play a pivotal role in establishing regional cooperation to set AI norms and create regulations. Initially, this could be pursued within the framework of NATO, leveraging the security alliance to influence AI standards on a broader scale. Subsequently, Türkiye could expand this initiative to collaborate with other regional powers, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to form a cohesive approach to AI governance in the region. This strategy would not only enhance Türkiye's technological and military capabilities but also position it as a key player in shaping AI norms within the international community.

A potential Harris administration's approach to AI regulation would likely result in a more immediate focus on AI challenges to American society such as labor displacement, healthcare, and human rights. At the same time, close collaboration with major tech companies could enable the administration to strike a balance between fostering innovation and ensuring regulation while seeking a more cooperative approach to AI development in the international arena. This strategy would allow the Harris administration to remain a leader in defense applications of AI and prevent the US from falling behind in its competition with China. Just as the Biden administration implemented the chip design ban and sought the passage of the CHIPS Act, a Democratic administration might be expected to seek continued US leadership in AI.

Harris' approach might differ from that of Trump's in how norms and regulations tailored to American interests might be achieved, i.e. through cooperation or coercive measures against other countries. Harris would likely advocate for greater international collaboration as it has already been seen in the partnership between the AI safety institutes in the US and the UK, an area of cooperation that could expand under her presidency. Moreover, Harris would likely be open to dialogue with the Chinese government on AI risks and safety issues. In fact, during a 2023 meeting between Biden and Xi, both governments expressed interest in discussing AI's risks.¹⁴ At this point, there were discussions whether this dialogue could expand to topics such as nuclear command and control. Harris might choose to build on these initiatives in the name of a more cooperative approach with China.

¹⁴Sydney J. Freedberg Jr., "Biden Launches AI 'Risk and Safety' Talks with China. Is Nuclear C2 a Likely Focus?" *Breaking Defense*, (November 15, 2023), retrieved September 6, 2024, from <https://breakingdefense.com/2023/11/biden-launches-ai-risk-and-safety-talks-with-china-is-nuclear-c2-a-likely-focus/>.

As the US will continue shaping the global AI discussions to align with its national interests, it is crucial for Türkiye to both establish its own regulatory framework and actively participate in global debates on AI. Türkiye can take concrete steps in AI development and security, such as establishing its own national AI safety institute. This organization would serve as a foundation for Türkiye to engage in global discussions on AI, ensuring that its voice and perspectives are represented in the international arena. Türkiye should also continue focusing on regional AI conversations to help enhance its AI capabilities.

In conclusion, as the global landscape of AI continues to evolve and the US presidential elections coming soon, Türkiye must strategically position itself to navigate the varying approaches that may emerge under either a Trump or Harris administration. By focusing on AI innovation, developing robust regulations, and participating in international and regional dialogues, Türkiye can ensure that its interests are well-represented in the emerging global AI framework.

The AI race is likely to impact our future in ways that cannot easily be predicted regardless of the policies of the next US administration. Accordingly, countries like Türkiye will need to reckon with both the opportunities and challenges presented by the emerging technologies including AI by adopting proactive policies and making critical investments. It will be critically important to navigate the global dynamics created by the US-China competition while making smart choices given the emerging economic advantages. In order claim and retain a leadership role, Türkiye will need to consider national security and economic implications of AI applications both to address future challenges and to leverage opportunities.

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