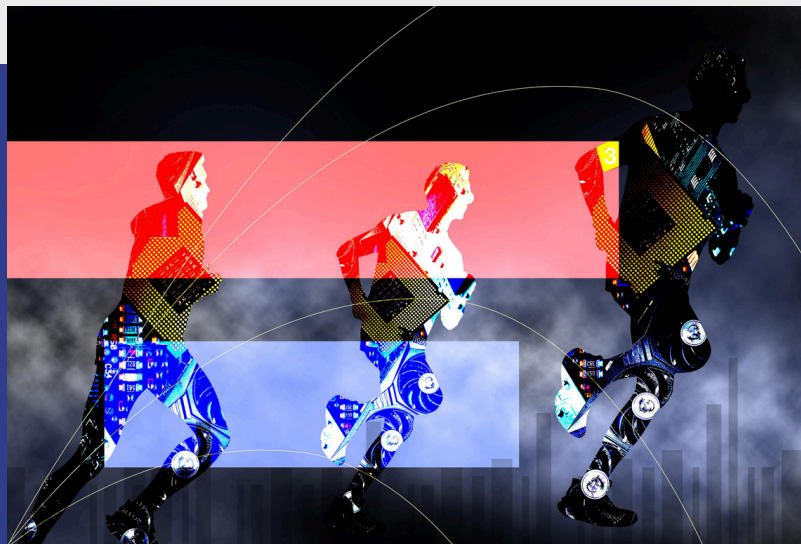


## Spotlight On: Open, Closed, and Public AI Models

In America, the artificial intelligence sector is currently dominated by closed-source, proprietary models developed by private companies. This dynamic has led to a concentration of market power, technical expertise, and political influence in a small number of companies and prompted a debate about alternative ownership models and development pathways. In the European Union, political leaders are discussing “AI sovereignty” following concerns of American AI dominance. Chinese open-weight models, such as Deepseek and Moonshot AI, are gaining popularity for their free-to-use software that allows users to download and modify the models themselves. And open-weight models are not only popular in China. American companies, such as Meta and Hugging Face, develop and advocate for open-weight models. Within the AI sector, a standoff between industry proponents of open-weight versus closed-weight models is brewing. Beyond the open/closed debate, some AI leaders are advocating yet another approach: public or public-interest AI. These models are government-funded, and in theory they are tailored to the needs of citizens (e.g. supporting local languages in specific countries) and aim to expand and democratize access to artificial intelligence technologies.

**Each of these approaches to AI entails tradeoffs between potential benefits and risks. This edition of the JCOTS newsletter will unpack the different approaches to AI development for policymakers and highlight several resources and news stories to follow on this topic.**



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## Terms to Know

- **Open-source models:** In open source models, information about training data and training processes, underlying model code, and model weights are disclosed, allowing any user to modify anything about the model
- **Open-weight models:** Models that disclose the weights, training data, and training practices that determine how data is interpreted, allowing users the ability to modify some aspects of the model
- **Closed-weight models:** No information about how the models were trained are disclosed
- **Public AI or Public Interest AI:** Public AI infrastructure designed to ensure AI technology is publicly accessible and for public well-being, often funded and owned by non-profits or governments
- **Governmental AI:** Governmental AI is artificial intelligence that is developed by governments and state-funded research labs. Because it is not a profit-generating endeavor, it may be used toward public goods that private AI companies have no interest in pursuing. Governmental AI is usually open-source and free to use, but it could also be internally used within governmental organizations
- **Private Open source AI:** AI that is owned and managed by a private company; however, as per the definition of open source AI, the information on the models training data, weights, and code using the weights are all disclosed.

# The Policy Issues Around...

## Open-Weight Models

Open weight models disclose their weights, which are numerical parameters that determine how strongly different inputs and neural connections influence the way the model produces outputs. Making these weights “open” means members of the public with some technical skills can run models locally and alter them to their specific needs. Importantly, open-weight models are different from open-source models, which publish the underlying code, training data, training procedures, and other information about the model. With open-source models, researchers and developers can look “under the hood,” allowing them to fully audit a model or rebuild it from scratch. Open-weight models, by contrast, still withhold some of this important information about how the model works.

Open-weight models offer some advantages over closed-weight models, such as allowing users to run models locally (on a personal device or server) or offline. Smaller, open-weight, models often are faster and cheaper to run than frontier models. Open-weight models also give deployers greater flexibility to customize models for their own needs, while avoiding subscription fees with AI companies. With the right technical architecture, running open-weight models locally also offers individuals and organizations more options for data protection and privacy.

However, the advantages come with some significant tradeoffs. Open-weight model capabilities are rapidly catching up to closed-weight proprietary models, and the fact that anyone can download and modify these models means they can spread quickly with little oversight. These features increase the likelihood that malicious actors can leverage open-weight models for scams or cyberattacks. Additionally, open-weight model users can easily remove safety guardrails that model developers put in place.

Although closed-weight models still dominate the American AI market, open-weight models lead the AI frontier in China. Models such as DeepSeek and Moonshot AI have been growing in popularity, prompting American companies to increasingly explore the advantages of open-weight model development. A debate about the merits of open- vs. closed-weight models is simmering in the U.S., as companies vie for market share based on competing visions of corporate oversight and responsibility.

### Further Information:

- <https://hai.stanford.edu/news/open-weight-models-arent-enough-we-need-truly-open-source-ai-models-for-science-and-society>
- <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-open-weight-challenge-us-ai-leadership>
- <https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/ai-open-models-have-benefits-so-why-arent-they-more-widely-used>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/28/technology/open-weight-ai.html>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/07/27/business/dealbook/open-closed-ai-debate.html>
- <https://www.mheducation.com/highered/blog/2026/08/why-ais-biggest-players-want-open-weight-ai.html>

## Public Interest AI

Public or public-interest AI refers to AI models developed with the explicit objective of supporting public well-being or providing public goods, rather than generating profit. This can be through creating a governmentally run and operated AI model, government (or public) ownership of AI, non-profit ownership of AI, or public investment in model development. The AI market is dominated by a few private AI companies that are developing commercial models for profit, leading lawmakers across the political spectrum to consider how to ensure the benefits of AI are distributed widely and equitably in society.

One plan, favored by Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders, would grant the public voting shares in AI companies, allowing an independent commission established to uphold the public interest's influence over the trajectory of AI model development. He is also proposing a one-time 50% tax on AI stock to limit the likelihood of AI market interest, with earnings allocated to support healthcare, education, and other public goods. Alternatively, Republican President Donald Trump has advocated for the U.S. government to buy shares in companies such as Intel — which provides chips to AI companies. Policymakers in other countries have also explored investing in AI model development, mainly through their domestic research institutions. A prominent example is a public model from Switzerland, Apertus.

There are many potential benefits of public interest AI, such as more transparency by default about how models were developed, the ability and incentive to tailor models to local contexts (such as providing support for local languages), the prioritization of public interest goals like safety and environmental responsibility, and the prospect of less reliance by governments on expensive contracts with private companies. However, public interest AI also raises some concerns around the potential for government-funded AI to be used for propaganda or oppression, the huge costs governments could incur in building and maintaining their own models, and the challenges of developing publicly acceptable rules to govern such models.

### Further Information:

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/10/technology/president-trump-americans-sharing-ai-wealth.html>
- <https://www.computerweekly.com/opinion/The-public-deserves-socially-beneficial-technology-in-return-for-its-AI-investment>
- <https://www.techpolicy.press/the-three-levels-of-public-interest-ai/>
- [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=6502522](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=6502522)