



Columnists

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The six principles of AI – a king’s speech for Andy Burnham

The politician expected to become the next prime minister needs to address the place of AI in a dynamic democracy. He may wish to consider this advice



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Now that we’re into regime change in the UK, I began to wonder whether Andy Burnham had done much thinking about AI. If he has, he’s been [keeping it to himself](#). But then he has a lot on his plate just now. So I thought it might be helpful if I came up with a king’s speech for him on the matter. After all, he’s already “king of the north”. So this can be used to inspire his new southern subjects after his impending “coronation”. Here’s how it goes.

“My government will be committed to building a vibrant AI-using democracy based on six principles:

1. Reclaiming democratic sovereignty



Unlike other jurisdictions where technology leaders have used their unconscionable wealth to crush state regulation, the UK will establish binding national guardrails that require companies to disclose alarming incidents and prohibit the release of models that pose an “unreasonable risk of critical harm”. We will vigorously reject any new “aristocracy” of techno oligarchs who seek to determine how we live and work. Instead of direct action and violence becoming the only way for the public to find leverage, we will create institutional channels for meaningful community input on - and response to - the technology’s trajectory.

2. Rebuilding state capacity

My government will use AI primarily to *augment* state capacity and improve the provision of public services. We will do this by prioritising the use of the technology to assist human decision-making by providing officials with better and more timely information.

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In healthcare, for example, we will build on existing NHS research using AI-powered triage systems with human oversight to dramatically reduce waiting times. In welfare services, we will focus on helping people claim what they are entitled to – a novel proposal, given that other jurisdictions’ enthusiasm for the technology has mostly gone towards [catching people out](#). In our criminal justice system, we will use AI to reduce the chronic backlog of about 80,000 criminal cases by using the technology to match trials to available crown court time. In education, we will focus on how AI can be used to enrich learning and support teachers rather than replacing them.

3. Local consent for national infrastructure



Datacentres are becoming the “grey satanic mills” of the fourth industrial revolution.

My government will introduce binding statutory requirements to ensure that datacentre operators pay for the increased electrical grid capacity they require so that ordinary citizens do not end up footing the bill for tech infrastructure; and that they provide direct, substantial funding to the areas in which they are located, thereby transforming these “windowless boxes” into tangible assets for local communities.

4. A ‘grand bargain’ for economic security

Conflict around AI will only resolve peacefully if we address the fear that the ultimate goal of those who control the technology is to reduce the economic value of humans to zero.

On wealth redistribution, my government will explore statutory measures that give voters a stake in future tech profits, similar to bipartisan proposals for the public to hold a share in AI firms.

On protecting livelihoods, my government will implement policies that meaningfully redistribute the gains of AI to those most disrupted by it. We will prioritise “enabling technologies” that assist and augment workers over “replacing technologies” designed purely to automate existing human tasks.

5. Supporting human artistry

AI companies have been playing fast and loose with intellectual property.

We will introduce robust transparency rules and strengthen property rights for UK artists, ensuring that tech corporations cannot undermine the nation’s creative economy by scraping work without consent or profit by reselling bot-generated “enshittified” versions of human craft and artistic endeavour.

6. Measurement and realism



The paucity of reliable information about AI is dangerous for democracy.

In order to counter both viral misinformation and industry propaganda, my government will use the UK AI Security Institute and our new AI Economics Institute to provide the public with clear, independent statistics on how AI is actually affecting job losses and employment, energy usage and the environment.

In addressing the challenges and opportunities of this new industrial revolution, my government will be guided by the celebrated metaphor of former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping of “crossing the river by feeling the stones”. We will move forward iteratively, planning for problems while staying flexible enough to make adjustments as the true risks and rewards of AI deployment become clear. God save the King!”

What I’ve been reading

AI rules of engagement

[America’s AI Policy Is Truly Chaotic](#) is Francis Fukuyama’s blogpost on how regulating AI has suddenly become a national security problem.

Poll-axed

A characteristically sharp Substack post by David Aaronovitch on the flaky trial-by-opinion-polling process that brought the UK prime minister down is [Killing Keir and Admiring Andy](#).

Macro economics

The *London Review of Books* has an astute analysis of the cost of living crisis by William Davies in his essay [Burnham’s Political Economy](#).



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