HARVARD
Advanced Leadership Initiative

Executive Summary

Human Rights and Inequality in the Digital Century Deep Dive

March 23-25, 2022

Key Takeaways

- Pre-and-current pandemic worker policies continue to be unstable and unpredictable.
- Algorithms depend on large data sets and can perpetuate existing systemic biases.
- Advancing technology creates civil rights challenges and disparities.
- When the global south is included in the process of creating algorithms and AI systems, these tools can be used in a positive way.
- Technologies continue to advance—democracies must adapt their policies and regulations accordingly.

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The Advanced Leadership Initiative (ALI) is an innovative academic program designed to unleash the potential of experienced leaders to help solve society's most pressing challenges. Participants become part of a vibrant community of changemakers who continue learning, collaborating, and innovating for impact.

ALI Deep Dive sessions highlight one major global or community challenge where ALI Fellows might engage. Deep Dives include specialized readings, notable speakers including industry experts, and faculty from relevant cross-university Harvard programs. These highly interactive sessions focus on problem solving with practical applications of knowledge.

ALI Fellows contribute ideas based on their experience and knowledge to identify solutions. Fellows are able to learn from expert practitioners in the field and consider the needs and perspectives of affected constituencies.

2022 ALI Fellows participate in discussion

Key Takeaways

- **Pre-and-current pandemic worker policies continue to be unstable and unpredictable.**

As times have changed, and society continues to operate on a 24-hour work schedule, jobs have become more precarious and economic risks have shifted from businesses to household workers. Scholars who have studied work over the decades have found wages to be most important to people, but with the growing number of people in working poverty where wages continue to be low and stagnant, there is an increase value placed on workplace stability. Now, stability and more predictable pay outweigh the level of pay in terms of importance for workers.

In a study called "The Shift Project" conducted by Professor Daniel Schneider, workers in retail and service sectors detailed their unstable and unpredictable schedules across industries. Prof. Schneider's research indicates that instability has both a negative impact on employee morale and also creates issues around customer service that negatively affects businesses.

There is wide variability in how companies are addressing these scheduling issues and worker policies, and it is difficult to know the direct

Prof. Mathias Risse welcomes ALI Fellows

impact that the pandemic may have on worker stability moving forward. Though wages are higher post-pandemic, technology is also replacing many service jobs.

Government can play a role in shaping worker policies, but most effective policies are at the state and local levels rather than at the federal level. Studies such as "The Shift Project" provide crucial data to help create policies and analyze whether these policies work. Many times, the laws do not solve the problem completely, but do protect and improve the lives of retail and service workers.

- **Algorithms depend on large data sets and can perpetuate existing systemic biases**

Large social media platforms and search engines, like Facebook and Google, use algorithms to optimize their advertisement delivery systems. When a company advertises a job posting, the platform will use an algorithm to match the ad to the user in order to gain clicks on that post. This means that the algorithm draws on large data sets that contain information about users including demographics and previous click behaviors to make the decision of which ads are shown to which person.

In practice, this means women are shown ads for lower wage jobs, because data sets indicate that women historically occupy lower wage roles. The model perpetuates existing biases by drawing on historical data. Artificial intelligence (AI) systems are trained using

> **" An accurate AI or machine learning system will accurately replicate the inequalities of our world. "**
>
> - Josh Simons

real-world data, so unless those data are deliberately curates, outcomes will reflect any systemic bias encoded in data sets from the past.

- **Advancing technology create civil rights challenges.**

Algorithms are useful in helping make predictions, but as technology advances at such a fast pace, there is always a chance of creating new biases that later affect decision making. Since large search engines such as Google rely heavily on user behavior, existing

racial biases will inform the development of new algorithms.

To identify where algorithms are problematic, developers and regulators must create new tools to monitor and respond to modern technology. They must also develop expertise to audit and review new technologies. With human intervention, there is less of a chance that past practices that systemically impact groups of people will be brought forward into the future.

- **When the global south is included in the process of creating algorithms and AI systems, these tools can be used in a positive way.**

There are positive aspects to the advance of technology, such as connecting communities and finding new ways to use AI to support individuals in the global south. Technology companies need to work to understand the context of other countries in order to reduce impacts on marginalized groups. For example, AI has the power to target the powerful in Latin America and help to root out corruption. In Africa, there is a movement for local developers to build their own AI systems in order to preserve African values and share tools across their communities to help build their own products. To ensure advancing technology is inclusive, there not only needs to be proper data systems, but also stakeholders present who understand the local context and the potential impact of these technologies.

Cathy O'Neil of ORCAA Risk discusses how algorithms work, how often they fail, and ways to audit and regulate them

Prof. Daniel Schneider discusses his research on unpredictable work schedules affecting household economic security

- **Technologies continue to advance—democracies must adapt their policies and regulations accordingly.**

Democracy around the world is at threat and technology has a key role to play in its future success or failure. In particular, new technology greatly impacts the way information is communicated to the public. Lawmakers need to develop new policies to regulate this technology.

New policies to protect democracy should focus on three issues: preventing the shift to authoritarianism and ensuring a peaceful transition of power; protecting voting efforts, including preventing voter suppression, and preventing gerrymandering; and ensuring responsiveness to the public. Democracy in the United States and around the world must adapt to respond to new challenges in human rights, inequality, and technology.

> **"Algorithms don't say 'you did this in the past, so you'll do this in the future'; they say, 'people like you did this in the past, so you'll do this in the future'"**
>
> - Cathy O'Neil

Faculty Chair

Meredith Rosenthal
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Deep Dive Faculty Chair

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Speakers

Chinmayi Arun
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Speakers (con't)

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