Centre for International
Governance Innovation

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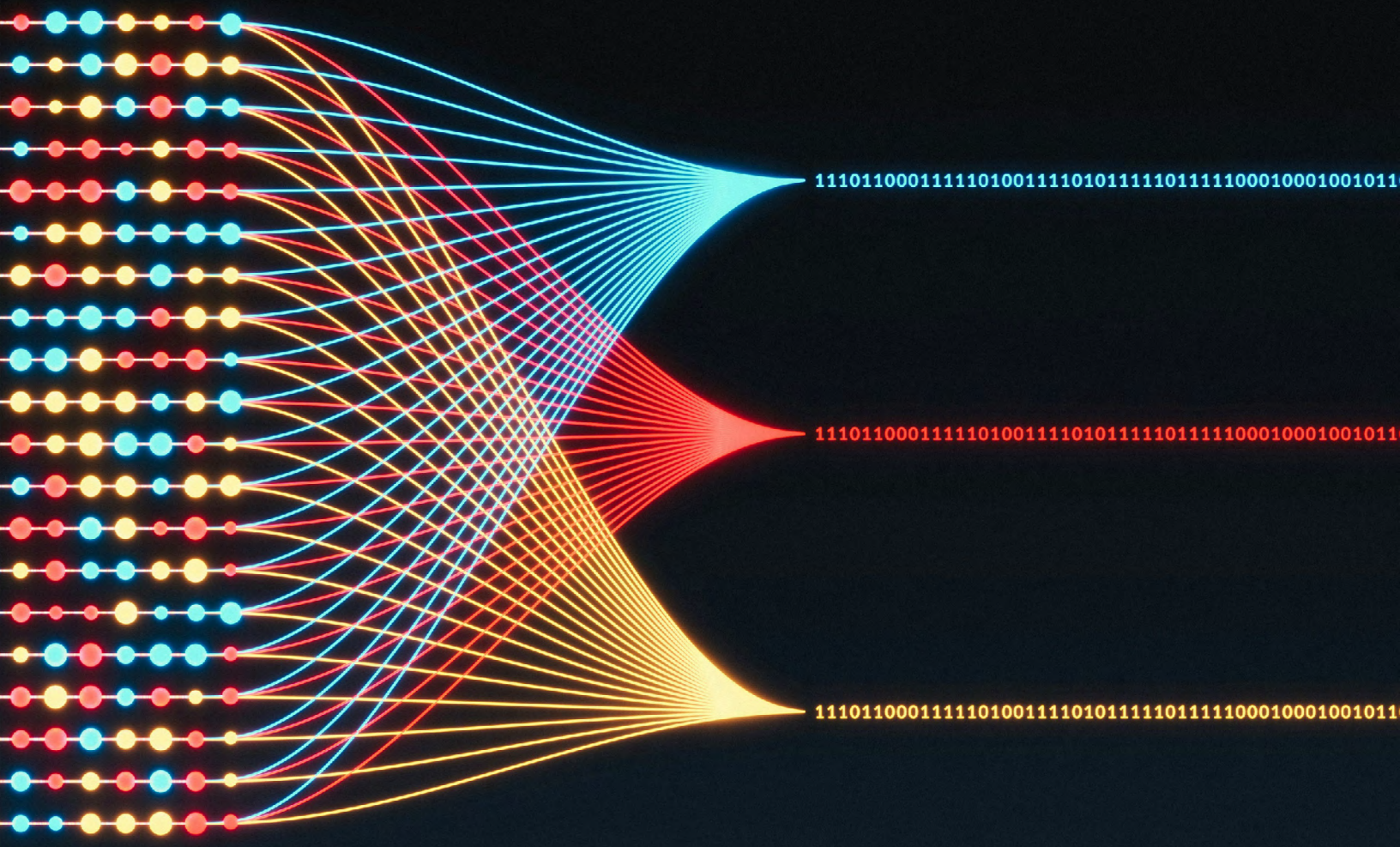
Susan Ariel Aaronson and Michael Moreno



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# About the Authors

Susan Ariel Aaronson is a CIGI senior fellow, research professor of international affairs at George Washington University (GWU) and co-principal investigator with the NSF-NIST Institute for Trustworthy AI in Law & Society, where she leads research on data and artificial intelligence (AI) governance. She is also a GWU Public Interest Technology Scholar and a Balsillie Tech Scholar. Her research interests relate to the relationship between economic change, human rights and good governance.

Susan directs the Digital Trade and Data Governance Hub at GWU. The Hub was founded in 2019 and educates policy makers, the press and the public about data governance and data-driven change through conferences, webinars, study groups, primers and scholarly papers. It is the only organization in the world that maps the governance of public, proprietary and personal data at the domestic and international levels. The Hub's research has been funded by foundations such as Ford and Minderoo.

Susan is currently researching chatbots and responsible AI, AI protectionism and AI-enabled manufacturing. She is also developing a new metric for AI data governance. She regularly writes op-eds for *Barron's*, *Fortune* and other publications, and has been a commentor on economics for NPR's *Marketplace*, *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition*, and for NBC, CNN, the BBC and PBS.

Previously, Susan was a guest scholar in economics at the Brookings Institution (1995–1999) and a research fellow at the World Trade Institute (2008–2012). Susan was also the Carvalho Fellow at the Government Accountability Project and held the Minerva Chair at the National War College. She has served on the business and human rights advisory board at Amnesty International and the advisory board of Human Rights under Pressure, a joint German and Israeli initiative on human rights.

In her spare time, Susan enjoys triathlons and ballet.

Michael Moreno is an AI and data governance researcher in the Digital Trade and Data Governance Hub at GWU, where he supports the NSF-NIST Institute for Trustworthy AI in Law & Society. Currently, Michael is researching chatbots and responsible AI, comparative public participation in AI governance, AI overcapacity and AI-enabled manufacturing. Michael holds a B.A. in Latin American studies and political science from Macalester College and an M.A. in international affairs from GWU.

# Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AI | artificial intelligence |
| ASI | artificial swarm intelligence |
| CDT | Center for Democracy & Technology |
| DISR | Department of Industry, Science and Resources |
| IAP2 | International Association for Political Participation |
| LLMs | large language models |
| MinCiencias | Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation |
| NGOs | non-governmental organizations |
| NTIA | National Telecommunications and Information Administration |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |

# Executive Summary

Policy makers and citizens alike increasingly rely on artificial intelligence (AI). Because of AI's economic and societal impact, officials are seeking public comment on AI governance. Meanwhile, many people have strong opinions about AI, and they want policy makers to listen as they translate public comments into policy, but much of what citizens have to say is getting lost. As a result, policy makers are missing an important opportunity to build public trust in AI and its governance.

This paper[1] compares three countries that sought public comment on AI risks and policies to mitigate those risks. The authors used a landscape analysis to examine whether and how Australia, Colombia and the United States invited citizens to comment on AI governance. The authors did not find that citizens and policy makers established a constructive dialogue about AI. None of the three countries made significant efforts to obtain diverse public comments. They did not utilize multiple platforms to inform citizens that they were seeking input. Moreover, they did little to provide their citizens with the information they needed to respond effectively to the calls. Consequently, in all three nations, less than one percent of the population responded to the calls. Moreover, policy makers did not appear responsive to what they heard from the few who participated. The authors found a persistent gap between the promise and practice of participatory AI governance.

To ensure that AI governance is trustworthy and effective, the authors recommend that policy makers adopt one or more of the following options: support AI literacy; consistently monitor public comment; publicize calls for comment through online and offline strategies; regularly hold online town halls on AI; use innovative engagement strategies; ensure participation from under-represented groups; be responsive to what people say; and do more to ensure that citizens have an opportunity to comment. The authors also suggest ways that policy makers could utilize various types of AI systems to facilitate the consultative process.

1 This paper is based on work supported, in part, by the NSF-NIST Institute for Trustworthy AI, which is supported by the National Science Foundation under award 2229885. Any opinion, finding, and conclusion or recommendation expressed herein represents that of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the views of NSF.

# Introduction

Democratic governance is a dialogue between the government and its constituents (Dewey 1927). As democracies evolved in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, democratic policy makers understood that they needed a mechanism to inform their citizens about changing policies and government opportunities. Policy makers could then use these comments to improve governance. In so doing, democracies could build trust and legitimacy. They may also achieve better public policies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2022).

Like many of their constituents, policy makers struggle to understand and govern AI due to its opacity and complexity. In many countries, government officials lean on individuals (academics and business leaders) who have developed or invested in AI, and who are best positioned to explain various AI systems. But these same "experts" often have a direct interest in whether and how AI should be regulated (Aaronson 2025; OECD 2025b). Moreover, these experts often work for, or are affiliated with, the major suppliers of AI. Meanwhile, these AI suppliers are the same data giants that have captured much of the world's personal data through their provision of online services such as social networks (Zuboff 2019; Bradford 2023). These firms already have significant political influence due to their economic power. In Canada, for example, some of these firms have pushed back on digital taxes and various approaches to regulating AI services (Yashiro, Jeloka and Carvão 2025; Clement 2023).

But policy makers in democracies should consult such experts not only because they have a clear stake in a specific governance outcome but also because they may see and utilize AI differently from the broader public (Pew Research Center 2025; Poushter, Fagan and Corichi 2025). AI issues are complex and require citizens to be well informed (through AI literacy). In turn, in order to have effective consultations, policy makers must be willing and able to devote time and effort to ensuring their constituents have the information they need to provide informed input (Maas 2023; Aaronson and Zable 2023).

Moreover, AI, like many technologies, is simultaneously beneficial to humanity and dangerous to individuals and groups. For

example, AI use may improve economic growth and human welfare but may also lead to job loss and underemployment (OECD 2024a, 2025a). Given the two-faced nature of AI, the OECD recommends that "engaging diverse actors early in the technology development cycle enriches the understanding of issues, fosters trust, and aligns technological innovation with societal needs" (OECD 2024b, 11). Officials should take care "to balance the range of perspectives and ensure that vocal vested interests do not dominate the process. Tools for societal engagement, including capacity-building, communication, consultation and co-creation should be leveraged to ensure broad-based participation and alignment of science and co-design of technology strategies and governance" (ibid.).

Meanwhile, polls reveal that citizens are deeply concerned about AI. A 2023 survey of 24,000 people in 21 countries by the Schwartz Reisman Institute for Technology and Society, University of Toronto, found that some 73 percent of those polled understood what AI is, but they were less well informed about specific applications (Arai and Jankovic 2024). In general, the public is concerned about potential risks to employment, human autonomy, democracy and human rights (ibid.). Another global study by Ipsos found that from 2022 to 2023, the proportion of those who think AI will dramatically affect their lives in the next three–five years increased from 60 to 66 percent (Stanford University Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence 2024, chapter 9, 4). When asked who should regulate AI, the researchers found that people prefer that AI development companies do so. But when asked if they trust tech companies to self-regulate, only 21 percent of the respondents said "yes" (Arai and Jankovic 2024).

This is the third in a series of four papers for CIGI that examines the AI feedback loop between policy makers and their constituents. The authors used a landscape analysis to compare:

- US efforts to seek public comments on the risks and benefits of open- versus closed-source AI models;[2]
- Colombia's effort to obtain feedback on its road map for ethical and sustainable AI adoption through its Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation (MinCiencias);[3] and
- Australia's efforts to obtain comments on its "Supporting Responsible AI" discussion paper prepared by the Department of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR).[4]

The authors chose these countries because each acknowledged and openly published all the comments they received (which allowed the authors to examine who commented), and each took a different approach to the public comment process.

The authors found that none of the governments received comments from a sizeable and diverse cross-section of their constituents. In fact, Australia received 510 comments, the United States 326 and Colombia 73 (less than one percent of their respective populations). None of the countries provided sufficient background information for average citizens to comment effectively and because of this, these governments missed an opportunity to broadly foresee potential risks and concerns. Policy makers often asked a multitude of complex questions, which most people could not comprehend. Moreover, when the public did comment, these officials did little to respond to the feedback or change policies in response to what they heard. In sum, public comment got lost in translation or was never translated into policy.

The paper begins with an overview of the authors' methodology, followed by a discussion of the traditional process of seeking input. The next section details the authors' findings. Finally, the authors conclude that if policy makers genuinely want to achieve a participatory approach to AI governance, they need to rethink the consultative process for the age of AI. The authors then make several suggestions.

2 This was the topic of another CIGI paper, *Talking to a Brick Wall: The US Government's Response to Public Comments on AI* (Aaronson 2025), which examined the consultation in depth.

3 See Colombia's spreadsheet and consultation at https://datagovhub.elliott.gwu.edu/spreadsheets-for-public-concerns-about-ai-are-getting-lost-in-translation/.

4 See Australia's spreadsheet and consultation at https://datagovhub.elliott.gwu.edu/spreadsheets-for-public-concerns-about-ai-are-getting-lost-in-translation/ and industry consultation at https://consult.industry.gov.au/supporting-responsible-ai/submission/list.

# Methodology

The authors relied on the consistent methodology established for the first paper (Aaronson and Zable 2023, 7). The researchers began by creating a list of everyone who responded to the call. They then conducted a landscape analysis, dividing the respondents into groupings that reflected their own descriptions as delineated in their comments or on a relevant webpage that described their occupation and/or interests. The researchers' analysis is focused less on the comments, per se, and more on the process of obtaining and incorporating those comments into a report on those consultations. The researchers then address five key questions:

- How and when did the government engage with its citizens?
- What materials did the government provide to prepare the public to give informed advice?
- Did policy makers attempt to ensure a broad cross-section of people knew about and could comment on the proposed policy?
- Who responded to the call for comment?
- Did the government provide evidence it made use of the feedback it received?

The authors next used the International Association for Political Participation (IAP2) spectrum to characterize each case study's level of political participation. The IAP2 is an international association that provides public participation practitioners around the world with the tools, skills and training to advance and extend the practice of public participation (see Figure 1). The findings and background data are available on the Digital Trade and Data Governance Hub research website.[5]

## Figure 1: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

### IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

IAP2's Spectrum of Public Participation was designed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the public's role in any public participation process. The Spectrum is used internationally, and it is found in public participation plans around the world.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION

| | INFORM | CONSULT | INVOLVE | COLLABORATE | EMPOWER |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL | To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions. | To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions. | To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered. | To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution. | To place final decision making in the hands of the public. |
| PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC | We will keep you informed. | We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. | We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. | We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible. | We will implement what you decide. |



*Source:* https://iap2usa.org/cvs. Reprinted with permission.

5 See https://datagovhub.elliott.gwu.edu/.

# A Historical Perspective on the Process of Seeking Input in the Three Case Studies

Policy makers in the three countries relied on slightly different processes to inform and speak with their constituents. The US process is almost a century old, based on legislation passed in 1935 establishing the Federal Register. The register is essentially a list of presidential proclamations and executive orders, documents required to be published by an act of Congress as well as documents authorized to be published by regulations (GovInfo 2006). Since 2003, when the register moved online, US agencies have used Regulations.gov to solicit public comments on proposed regulations (Coglianese, Kilmartin and Mendelson 2009; Coglianese and Rubin 2019). In 1946, the US Congress passed the Administrative Procedure Act, which requires that agencies not only publish notices of proposed rulemaking in the Federal Register, but also provide an opportunity for public comment before final rules can be put into effect.

Australia's process is similar but relatively new; its Parliament created the Federal Register of Legislation (the Register) in 2023. According to its website, the Register "contains the full text and details of the lifecycle of individual laws and the relationships between them."[6] The Australian Government (2020, 12–13) often creates discussion papers and asks citizens to respond to these papers.[7] Hence, it curates its citizens' feedback.

Colombia formally established mechanisms for public consultation through article 103 of its 1991 Constitution,[8] which recognizes various forms of citizen participation, and further institutionalized these tools with Law 134 of 1994, which created the National Popular Consultation as a means for the president to seek public input on issues of national significance.[9] The government uses social media and official websites to encourage feedback and then uses Google Forms to collect that feedback (MinCiencias 2024b, 2024d, 2024e).

Although the process for seeking public input had evolved in all three nations, that process was incomplete and ineffective for three main reasons:

- The few people who responded tended to be policy insiders (those who closely followed governance). These respondents already had a voice in their country's government and were sophisticated at influencing policy.
- Simply calling for public comment cannot guarantee a diverse and broad sample of the populace.
- The internet and data-driven technologies such as AI were changing rapidly, and government officials and the policies they developed were quickly becoming outdated or ineffective.

In recent years, the OECD has proposed ways that governments could reform the regulatory process to be both more responsive and more effective. It recommended that governments adopt a new approach to regulation. Agile governance or regulation recognizes that "holistic, open, inclusive, adaptive, and better-co-ordinated governance models enhance systemic resilience by enabling the development of agile, adaptive regulation that upholds fundamental rights, democratic values, and the rule of law" (OECD 2025a). But the OECD did not explain how governments could achieve that balance. The authors' findings reveal that none of the countries in the case studies has achieved a holistic, open, inclusive or agile public consultation process.

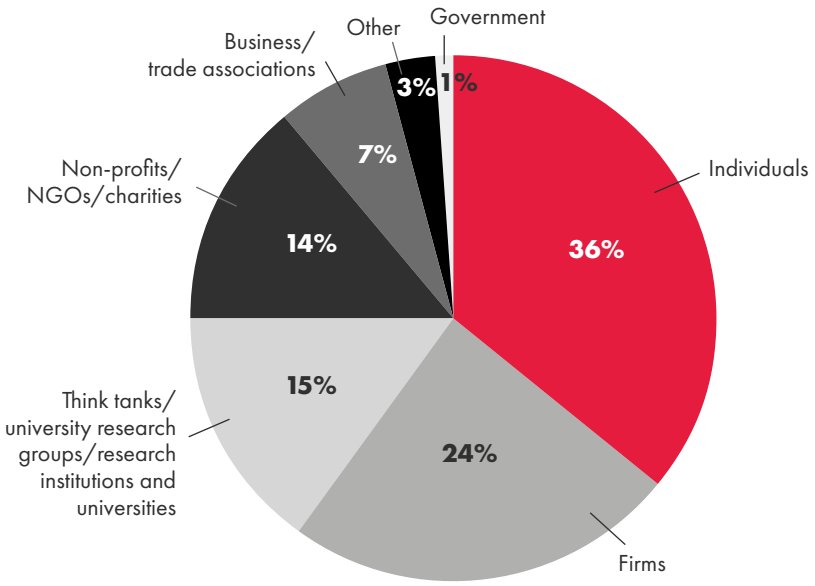
6 See www.legislation.gov.au/.

7 See www.legislation.gov.au/ and www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-publications/submissions-and-discussion-papers.

8 Colombia, *Constitución Política de la Republica de Colombia* 1991, art 103, online: <www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma_pdf.php?i=4125>.

9 Colombia, *Ley 134 de 1994: Por la cual se dictan normas sobre mecanismos de participación ciudadana* [Ley estatutaria], 31 May, online: <www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=330>.

## Figure 2: Australia Respondent Breakdown



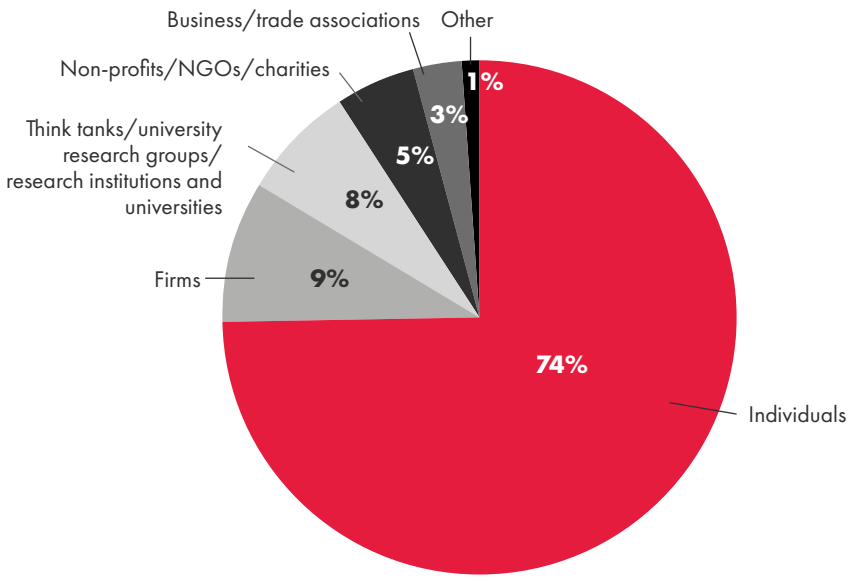

*Source:* Figure by Michael Moreno.
*Note:* NGOs = non-governmental organizations.

## Table 1: Australia Respondent Breakdown

| Respondent | Percentage of Total | Count |
|---|---|---|
| Individuals | 36.01% | 161 (47 anonymous) |
| Firms | 23.70% | 106 |
| Think tanks/university research groups/research institutions and universities | 14.80% | 66 |
| Non-profits/NGOs/charities | 14.30% | 65 |
| Business/trade associations | 6.70% | 30 |
| Other | 3.10% | 14 |
| Government | 1.30% | 5 |
| Total | | 447 |

*Source:* Table by Michael Moreno.

## Figure 3: US Respondent Breakdown



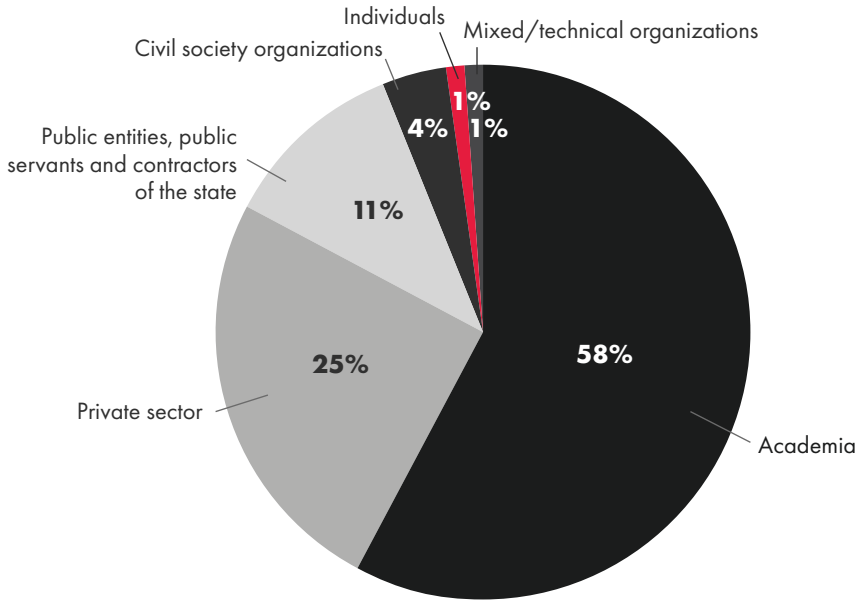

*Source:* Figure by Michael Moreno.

## Table 2: US Respondent Breakdown

| Respondent | Percentage of Total | Count |
|---|---|---|
| Individuals | 73.93% | 241 (81 anonymous) |
| Firms | 9.20% | 30 |
| Think tanks/university research groups/research institutions and universities | 7.67% | 25 |
| Non-profits/NGOs/charities | 5.21% | 17 |
| Business/trade associations | 2.76% | 9 |
| Other | 1.23% | 4 |
| Government | 0 | 0 |
| Total | | 326 |

*Source:* Table by Michael Moreno.

## Figure 4: Colombia Respondent Breakdown




*Source:* Figure by Michael Moreno.

## Table 3: Colombia Respondent Breakdown

| Respondent | Percentage of Total | Count |
|---|---|---|
| Academia | 57.5% | 42 |
| Private sector | 24.7% | 18 |
| Public entities, public servants and contractors of the state | 10.9% | 8 |
| Civil society organizations | 4.1% | 3 |
| Individuals | 1.4% | 1 |
| Mixed/technical organizations | 1.4% | 1 |
| Total | | 73 |

*Source:* Table by Michael Moreno.

# Summary of Findings

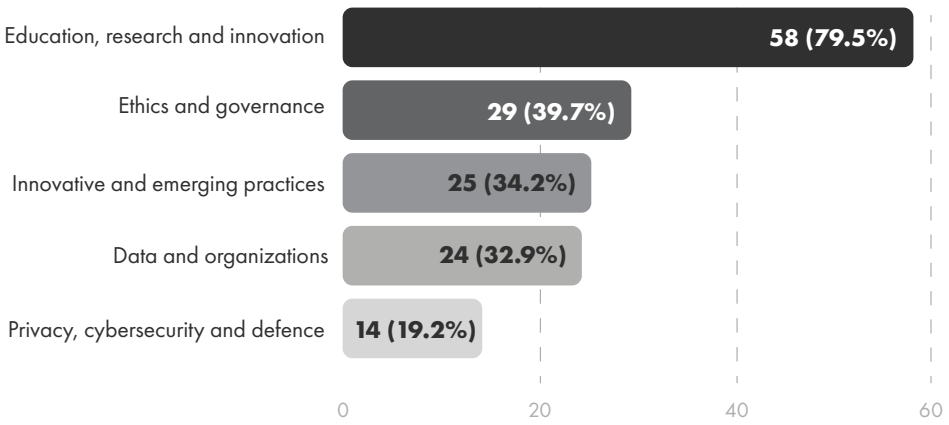
## Who Responded to the Call for Comment?

The tables and figures that follow illuminate who responded to each country's calls for comment.

The authors found the composition of respondents varied significantly across the three countries,[10] reflecting differences in how each government communicated its request for public input, its outreach strategies, consultation design and country-specific public concerns about AI.

10 Authors' analysis based on respondent composition data from the United States', Colombia's and Australia's public consultations on AI policy.

Figure 5: Self-Identified Areas of Expertise (Colombia)




*Source:* Figure by Michael Moreno.
*Note:* Respondents were allowed to click multiple areas of expertise.

# Demographics of Respondents

In Colombia, 73 respondents participated in MinCiencias' call for comment (see Table 3). The Colombian government's consultation form[11] specifically prompted respondents to describe their work sector, areas of expertise and relevant experience (notably in question 16). Consequently, the government gained personal demographic information.

While some participants indicated they represented firms when describing their experience (notably in question 16), the structure of the data collection made it difficult to reliably match specific comments to either individuals or organizations. Despite these challenges, analysis revealed distinct patterns in sectoral representation and self-identified expertise:

- Sectoral breakdown: responses from academia (57.5 percent), followed by the private sector/unions (24.7 percent); public entities (10.9 percent); civil society organizations (4.1 percent); and mixed/technical organizations (1.4 percent) (see Table 3).
- Expertise areas: education, research and innovation (79.5 percent); ethics and governance (39.7 percent); innovative and emerging industries (34.2 percent); data and organizations (32.9 percent); and privacy, cybersecurity and defence (19.2 percent) (see Figure 5).

This distribution suggests that Colombia's consultation primarily attracted participants with technical or academic backgrounds, rather than a broad cross-section of society. Policy makers received few comments from the general public or marginalized groups (MinCiencias 2024c, 15). As a result, these officials missed an opportunity to hear their concerns.

Australia's consultation process attracted the largest response of the sample countries, despite having the smallest population among the three (see Table 1). The DISR (2023, 8) received 510 submissions. However, only 447 were made public (see Table 1); some comments were confidential and submitted privately (ibid., 8), reflecting a mix of individual and institutional engagement distinct from both the US and Colombian consultations. While 36 percent of submissions came from individuals — a stark contrast to the 74 percent of individual respondents in the United States — the participation breakdown reveals a more balanced representation of organized stakeholders: firms (23.70 percent); non-profits/charities/NGOs (14.30 percent); business/trade associations (6.70 percent); think tanks/university research groups/research institutions (14.80 percent); and government entities (1.30 percent). Forty-seven of the individual submissions were anonymous.

11 See https://inteligenciaartificial.minciencias.gov.co/consulta-ciudadana-hoja-de-ruta-ia/

The consultation process was not just online: policy makers sought comments at three ministerial round tables (64 participants); one virtual town hall (345 participants); four in-person round tables (59 participants); and four virtual round tables (81 participants) (ibid., 7). The authors note that they were unable to verify who participated in the live events, however, as no participant details were released.

In the United States, some 326 individuals or groups submitted comments (see Table 2). Individuals contributed 74 percent of the comments; firms nine percent; think tanks/research institutions eight percent; non-profits/charities/NGOs five percent; and other entities one percent (see Figure 2). Notably, 34 percent of the 241 individual respondents chose anonymity, though some partially disclosed their professions (for example, "artist," "systems engineer") to contextualize their expertise (Aaronson 2025, 11). Interestingly, anonymous respondents strongly advocated for open-source AI systems.

In sum, none of the three governments was able to engage a broad cross-section of their populace.

## What Materials Did the Government Provide to Prepare the Public to Give Informed Advice?

Each of the case study governments provided their constituents with materials to ensure they had baseline knowledge to comment on AI policies. In the United States, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) included a supplemental information section with its call for comment, providing background, an explanation of its legal authority to conduct the consultation, definitions of key terms and a comprehensive list of nine major questions with 52 sub-questions. The authors recognized that even the most engaged respondents would struggle to answer all of these questions in an in-depth manner; in fact, they found that most participants answered only a few questions. Some of the respondents seemed confused by the specifics and sheer number of the questions (Aaronson 2025).

In contrast to the United States, Colombia's MinCiencias (2024a) announced the release of a preliminary version of its AI road map on January 27, just two days before the public consultation opened. The road map identified five main focus areas (ibid., 42–43, 45–46, 48):

- ethics and governance;
- education, research and innovation;
- data and organizations;
- innovative and emerging industries; and
- privacy, cybersecurity and defence.

While the road map provided a comprehensive outline and addressed sustainable and ethical considerations, access to the draft may have been limited. MinCiencias did not include the consultation document in its call for comment on its website or on social media. One respondent noted difficulty even finding the document.[12] Potential respondents were given a brief consultation window (from January 29 to February 6, 2024) to address these issues. As a result, only 73 individuals took part.

The consultation was conducted with a Google form, which has now been deleted, and included both technical and personal questions. The fact that officials did not attach the consultation document to the call for comments, combined with the short response timeframe, meant that the general public was unlikely to hear about the call for comment, let alone participate. Moreover, many participants did not answer all the questions.[13] Hence, Colombian policy makers did not sufficiently prepare the public nor allow enough time for successful engagement and meaningful feedback.

Australia offered a range of materials to help citizens better understand the issues and provide informed feedback. The materials included:

- a discussion paper at the start of the consultation on June 1, 2023 (DISR 2023);
- an overview of the consultation process (Australian Government 2022); and

12 Refer to commentor no. 47 in the Colombia spreadsheet at https://datagovhub.elliott.gwu.edu/spreadsheets-for-public-concerns-about-ai-are-getting-lost-in-translation/.

13 The authors' spreadsheet delineating this analysis will be placed on the resources section of the Digital Trade and Data Governance Hub website so that individuals can review the data set. See https://datagovhub.elliott.gwu.edu/spreadsheets-for-public-concerns-about-ai-are-getting-lost-in-translation/.

→ supplemental documents labelled "read more" on the official website, which offered additional information,[14] including a "related" section linking to previous consultations, enabling respondents to review the consultation process (DISR 2023).

Australia's approach was flexible, allowing citizens to comment at different times and in different ways. However, in drafting these materials, Australian officials seemed to assume that many respondents would have a baseline familiarity with AI governance, safety and risk concepts. As with the other case studies, participants answered only some of the questions.[15]

To summarize, while all three governments provided some materials on the background and objectives of the consultation, these documents were insufficient to enable the respondent to give well-informed comments on AI governance.

## Did Policy Makers Try to Ensure a Broad Cross-Section of People Knew About and Could Comment on the Proposed Policy?

Democracies seek public comment on a wide range of issues, from taxes to environmental governance. It is not easy to get people to comment, and it is even harder to get a representative sample of citizens to comment (OECD 2025b). Policy makers must find ways to inform citizens that they seek their input on such specific issues by promoting the calls to various key constituencies (see Table 4, which outlines how and when each government engaged with its citizens). However, the three governments made little effort to ensure that their citizens knew about the consultation. In the United States, President Joe Biden's executive order on AI included a call for public comment on open-source AI. Alan Davidson, assistant secretary of commerce for communications and information and NTIA administrator in the Biden administration, announced the call at several Washington, DC-area think tanks. NTIA also issued a Federal Register notice, allowing responses to be submitted online, by mail and by telephone, and provided contact information for staff to answer questions. There is little evidence, however, of targeted outreach beyond these speeches and formal channels (Aaronson 2025). NTIA neither publicized round tables, nor partnered with civil society organizations, and provided only a brief comment period. Consequently, while its process remained transparent and accessible, the respondents were insiders and not the broad public.

All three governments relied heavily on their respective government websites to request and collect public comments on AI safety and risks. Respondents therefore required internet access, which is not available or affordable for all people.

MinCiencias (2024c; 2024e) first announced the consultation via a post on its official website, with a brief, nine-day window for public comment (see Table 4). The post included a link to the Google form used to collect comments, the closing date and noted the importance of citizen involvement (ibid. 2024c).[16] Additionally, MinCiencias announced the call for input on its social media accounts on February 1, 2024, just five days before the response window closed (ibid. 2024e). This short timeframe and minimal publicity likely restricted awareness and participation. The authors could find no evidence that the Colombian government undertook additional outreach measures to solicit input from groups beyond its immediate digital audience.[17] Such measures could have included partnerships with civil society organizations, media coverage or community events.

Australia similarly relied on government websites and forms in its consultation process (see Table 4). After issuing a discussion paper, the government conducted a two-month consultation period. Australia also organized three ministerial round tables, a virtual town hall and eight in-person and virtual round tables.

14 The DSIR offered three documents labelled "read more"; see www.industry.gov.au/science-technology-and-innovation/technology/artificial-intelligence; www.industry.gov.au/science-technology-and-innovation/technology; and Bell et al. (2023).

15 See https://datagovhub.elliott.gwu.edu/spreadsheets-for-public-concerns-about-ai-are-getting-lost-in-translation/.

16 The authors note that in August 2023, the Colombian government announced on its website and at the forum "The Transformative Potential of Artificial Intelligence: Challenges in the Field of Ethics and Biodiversity Conservation" that MinCiencias would create an AI road map. As well, in December 2023, MinCiencias (2023a; 2023b) stated it would launch the road map in January 2024 to ensure the ethical and sustainable adoption of AI in Colombia .

17 Based on the authors reaching out to MinCiencias for comment, and reviewing the consultation websites, government social media posts and major news outlets between April and June 2025. No evidence of broader outreach was identified.

## Table 4: Overview of Public Consultation Timelines

| Country | Date | Phase | Key Event/Action | Documents/Output |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| United States (NTIA) | October 30, 2023 | 1 | President Joe Biden issues executive order mandating NTIA to gather public comments on AI-related matters. | Executive order no. 14110 |
| | December 13, 2023 | 2 | Alan Davidson announces the call for comments during speech at the Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT). | CDT speech |
| | February 20, 2024 | 3 | Call for comments formally posted on Federal Register, opening public comment period. | Federal Register notice, including background materials and detailed question list. |
| | March 27, 2024 | 4 | NTIA closes the public comment period. | — |
| | July 2024 | 5 | NTIA releases report to the White House. | Final report to the White House. |
| Colombia (MinCiencias) | August 11, 2023 | 1 | MinCiencias announces the creation of a road map for the development and application of AI in Colombia. | Creation of a road map announced during the forum "The Transformative Potential of AI" and in a post on the MinCiencias website. |
| | December 24, 2023 | 2 | On its website, MinCiencias states the road map will be released in January 2024. | — |
| | January 29, 2024 | 3 | MinCiencias formally posts call for comments on Google Forms, markets on its social media and websites. | The draft road map is released January 27, 2024; however, there is no official posting on its website of this draft. |
| | February 6, 2024 | 4 | Call for comment closes. | Public responses available. |
| | February 12, 2024 | 5 | Final version of the road map is released. | Final road map is released. |
| Australia (DISR) | June 1, 2023 | 1 | Call for comment opens. | Consultation document is released, along with other background and supporting documents. |
| | August 4, 2023 | 2 | Call for comment closes. | — |
| | January 17, 2024 | 3 | Response to the public is published. | Interim response is published by DISR. |

*Source:* Table by Michael Moreno.

The authors note that these expanded opportunities for public engagement helped the government obtain more comments by more people than the United States or Colombia. However, the government may have also benefited from public attention to risks raised by AI. The public consultation directly overlapped with the release of a report by the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme (2023) — a controversial automated debt recovery program that unlawfully used algorithmic tools to identify and reclaim welfare overpayments. The scandal disproportionately affected vulnerable populations and thus may have increased the public's willingness to participate in AI-related consultations.

In the United States, NTIA launched its AI consultation through speeches and a Federal Register notice (see Table 4), but it did not put much effort into encouraging discussion beyond the usual respondents — people who had a stake in open- versus closed-source issues. Colombia's one-week, single-post consultation on MinCiencias' website drew only a handful of responses, indicating limited public awareness and minimal effort to broaden participation. By contrast, Australia's eight-week "safe and responsible AI" process paired an online discussion paper with ministerial round tables and a virtual town hall, ensuring a more diverse cross-section of citizens could comment. Although each nation tried to get public engagement through diverse mechanisms and with varied degrees of effort, none of them made a sustained attempt to encourage broad participation.

## Did the Governments Provide Evidence that They Used the Feedback They Received?

If officials want to sustain public legitimacy and trust, they must not only acknowledge but also truly listen to what their constituents have to say. Such a government is more likely to create an effective feedback loop between itself and those it governs (OECD 2011). The authors therefore evaluated how the governments in the three case studies reported on and used the comments they received.

In contrast with other calls for public comment, the United States did not provide many specifics regarding who commented and what they said. In a March 21, 2024, speech to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Davidson noted that the agency had listened to concerns raised during its public consultation on open-source AI systems. But he did not discuss what they heard. Moreover, in the NTIA report on open-source AI risks, the government noted it had sought comment, but as discussed in Aaronson (2025), it did not share the results nor show how these comments influenced the report.

Colombia's government asserted that citizen feedback "improved" its final AI road map by incorporating "opinions, comments, technical suggestions, and proposals for new innovation paths." However, the final document (released on February 12, 2024, only six days after the consultation closed) retained the structure and content of the original draft without specifically addressing any changes derived from the public's comments (MinCiencias 2024d, 16).

After the June–August 2023 consultation, the Australian government released an interim report on January 17, 2024, detailing how the government engaged with citizens, what they heard and the government's interim response (DISR 2024). The document mapped public concerns to actionable measures, including establishing a temporary expert advisory group to design AI guardrails. The government promised to explore the establishment of a permanent advisory body, reflecting widespread stakeholder demand for sustained expert-public collaboration (ibid., 21).[18]

In summation, the authors were most struck by the failure of all three governments to be truly responsive to citizen concerns.

# Applying the IAP2 Spectrum of Political Participation

Lastly, the authors wanted to gauge how much effort policy makers put into meaningful public involvement. To do that, the authors turned to

18 The government's anonymous individual (no. 398) and the Insurance Council of Australia (submission no. 103), among others; see https://datagovhub.elliott.gwu.edu/spreadsheets-for-public-concerns-about-ai-are-getting-lost-in-translation/.

the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation (see Figure 1), which illustrates different modes of citizen participation, and supplemented it with findings derived from their research questions.

As Table 5 shows, the United States, Colombia and Australia all took steps to inform, consult and acknowledge the public but did little to involve, collaborate with or empower stakeholders throughout the process. Each government provided background information and explanatory materials to help the public understand the issues prior to publishing their strategies. They also solicited comments from both organized and unorganized publics through formal notices, online forms, public fora and, in Australia's case, a series of round tables and town halls. All three governments acknowledged receipt of public input: the United States referenced comments in official speeches and documents (NTIA 2024, 3); Colombia described public feedback as "improving" its final draft (MinCiencias 2024d, 17); and Australia published an interim response report. Australia's DISR (2023, 5–6) summarized stakeholder perspectives and how the government will ensure AI is designed, developed and deployed safely and responsibly.

Despite these efforts, none of the three governments really considered the comments they received and changed their policies. Hence, the authors cannot describe any of these governments as "responsive." Australian officials explained how the feedback influenced the creation of a temporary expert advisory group, which operated until September 30, 2024.[19] In contrast, neither the United States nor Colombia provided documentation showing how officials heard and responded to public feedback.

These three cases led the authors to believe that the current consultative process is not working. It is not effectively marketed; officials do not give their citizens the materials they need to fully participate; and policy makers often ignore, downplay or fail to utilize what citizens told them.

# Final Thoughts and Recommendations

Democracy must be a two-way street. Policy makers should seek, listen to and use public comment (Sheldon 2023). If public concerns are lost in translation, policy makers may find that citizens view public policies as unworthy of their trust. Unfortunately, in a recent study, the OECD found that across its member countries, on average, only 32 percent of citizens thought it likely that the government would adopt the opinions expressed in a public consultation (OECD 2025b, 17). The 2024 *OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions* found that across OECD member countries, on average, only 39 percent of respondents reported high or moderately high trust in their national governments (OECD 2024a).

To develop and sustain that trust, policy makers need to reassure the public that their views matter (OECD 2024b). In general, these officials have relied on in-person meetings or online public comment portals to seek such comment. Those strategies, however, are not encouraging the public to comment.[20] Instead, policy makers could:

## Table 5: Draft Mapping of Country Responses

| Country | Inform | Consult | Acknowledge | Responsive | Involve | Collaborate | Empower |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| United States | √ | √ | √ | | | | |
| Colombia | √ | √ | √ | | | | |
| Australia | √ | √ | √ | | | | |

*Source:* Table by Michael Moreno.

19 See www.industry.gov.au/science-technology-and-innovation/technology/artificial-intelligence/ai-expert-group-terms-reference.

20 See, for example, www.gsa.gov/policy-regulations/regulations/managing-the-federal-rulemaking-process-erulemaking/how-the-public-can-contribute-to-the-regulatory-process.

- **Support civic and digital literacy** so that individuals can better understand AI technologies, how they relate to their lives and how to contribute effectively to public consultations. The first step is to provide different forms of background materials on AI (such as short video explainers, brochures and white papers) that explain the technology and potential benefits/risks. In addition, policy makers could create a centralized, clearly accessible repository of relevant background materials.[21]
- **Establish, maintain and consistently monitor public comment portals** to demonstrate that these officials value public opinion. Officials should establish a clear point of contact who is always available to hear or receive feedback, and policy makers should show how they responded.
- **Widely market calls for comment** through both social and traditional media, using trusted voices (such as celebrities, academics, business leaders and policy makers) to encourage broad participation.
- **Regularly hold in-person or online town halls on AI** across the country and ensure that public concerns are genuinely heard and addressed.
- **Use innovative engagement strategies** such as policy hackathons (intense brainstorming sessions), public challenges (that give prizes for creative responses) and crowdsourcing initiatives to gain diverse perspectives.
- **Ensure participation from under-represented groups**, including those without reliable internet access or from marginalized socio-economic or ethnic communities, by designing inclusive consultation processes. Hold town halls in these communities.
- **Be responsive to what people say**. Ask questions, try to understand different perspectives and then demonstrate these concerns were heard. Various AI systems can help policy makers implement these processes by involving more people in a short period of time and helping them to feel heard.
- **Use new technologies that may provide different means of seeking input.** For example, AI-powered tools can facilitate conversations, analyze large volumes of comments to identify common themes and guide citizens through complex policy questions. These technological approaches should complement traditional engagement methods, ensuring policy makers reach the broadest possible audience while maintaining authentic and meaningful public participation."

Policy makers can use variants of swarm AI to enable large numbers of people to deliberate and find consensus on issues related to AI. A recent study (Miller 2025) by Carnegie Mellon researchers used artificial swarm intelligence (ASI), which enables networked groups of people to make collaborative decisions by deliberating in systems modelled on biological swarms such as flocks of birds. In 2023, researchers combined ASI with large language models (LLMs). The researchers worked with two groups of 75 participants who took part in a 30-minute session in which they brainstormed using both LLMs and a traditional chatroom (ibid.). Then, each individual completed a subjective feedback survey to compare the two experiences. The study found that (ibid.):

- Participants significantly preferred using ASI, reporting that it felt more collaborative and more productive and was better at producing high-quality answers.
- More than 80 percent of the participants reported feeling "more heard" during each ASI deliberation and came away feeling "more ownership" and "more buy-in" for the resulting answers than they did in a traditional real-time chat environment. The process can work with groups of more than 250 people.

Moreover, AI-powered technologies can help increase the impact of participatory processes by helping governments analyze and make sense of large amounts of data from their constituents. LLMs can analyze and summarize large pools of data in a short period of time (OECD 2025b). Finally, generative AI can lower the barriers to participate by helping the public navigate complex or technical language and aid participants using free chatbots such as ChatGPT or Gemini. However, users must know how to ask questions (called prompts) and recognize that these chatbots make mistakes.

21 The authors are grateful to one of their anonymous reviewers for this suggestion.

In sum, policy makers should rethink when and how they engage with their citizens in governing AI. Policy makers need citizens to comment, and both citizens and policy makers do not want their comments on AI to be lost in translation. With the right guardrails, AI could become a tool to help facilitate that engagement and, in so doing, sustain democracy (Mason 2025).

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