THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF PUBLIC AI ARE PUBLIC ACCESS AND PUBLIC FUNDING AND PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY

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PUBLIC AI

PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE AI MODELS FUNDED, PROVISIONED, AND GOVERNED BY GOVERNMENTS OR OTHER PUBLIC BODIES ON BEHALF OF THEIR CITIZENS.

POLITICALLY, public AI ensures that AI systems are built, governed, and operated in accordance with shared values and for the public's benefit. It also provides a mechanism to ensure that public funding for AI research results in public benefit rather than private capture.

ETHICALLY, developing public AI reflects the shared, open, and public nature of the digital commons, and of the cultural data upon which AI foundation models are built.

ECONOMICALLY, public AI guarantees healthy competition and investment in the AI sector, especially in those jurisdictions that invest in public AI infrastructure.

PUBLIC AI PROTECTS OUR VALUES.

Public AI presents an opportunity for publicly accountable actors to design for values aligned with the polity overseeing the public AI system without the need to compel private actors to do the same.
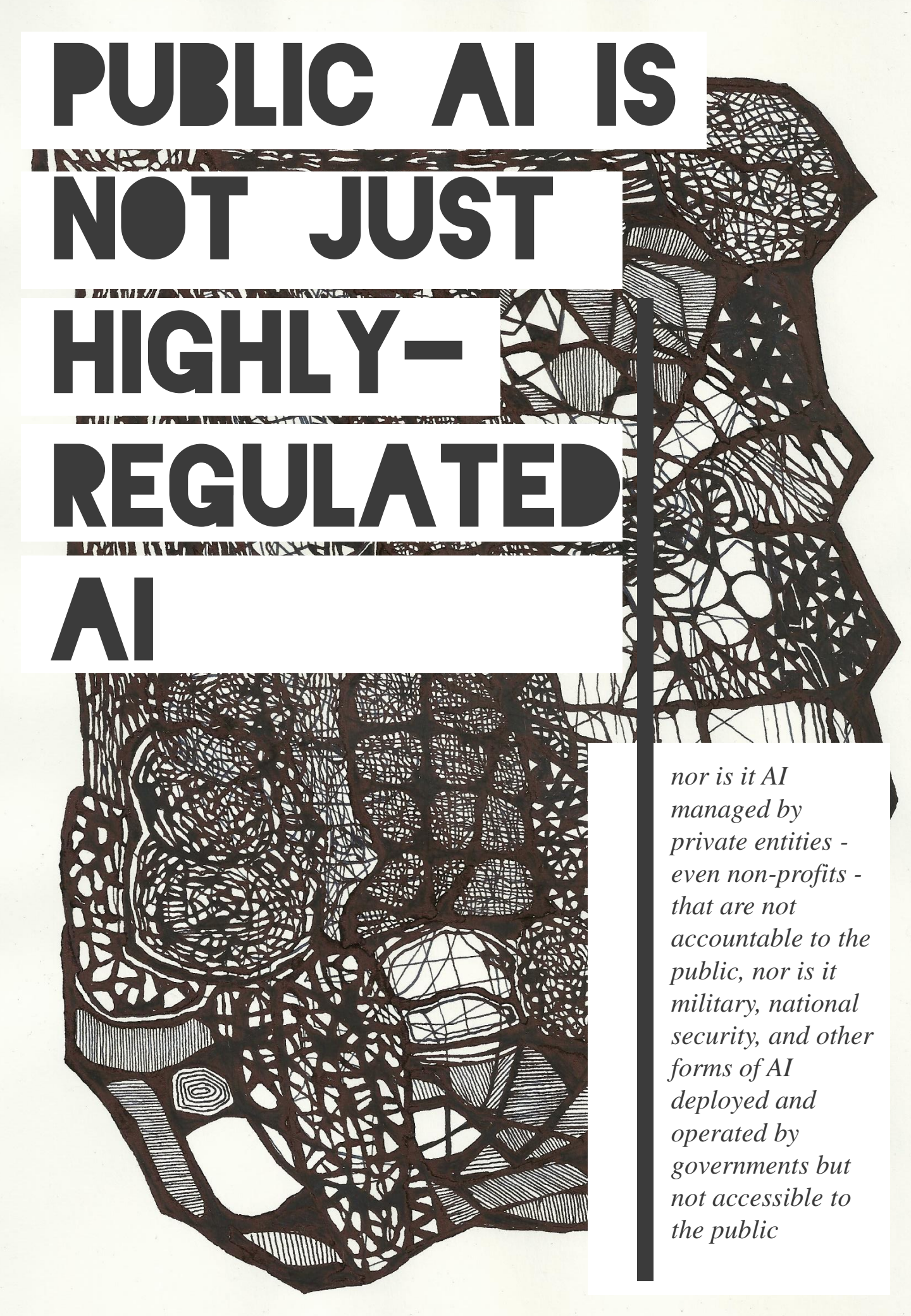
In all of its formulations, public AI allows people to develop foundational models with more direct forms of public input and democratic accountability, making it more readily usable for public functions that would demand public oversight and accountability.

PUBLIC AI ENSURES HEALTHY COMPETITION AND MARKETS.

From a competition perspective, a public option also provides a guaranteed competitive dynamic with incumbent private firms, especially in a mature sector.

Public AI can support access to market-competitive AI tools at or below cost, and provide a stable platform for innovation, as private actors can withdraw or change the conditions for support.

Additionally, public AI projects can support innovation and economic development within particular jurisdictions, helping polities capture some of the future gains of AI (whether in terms of jobs or income) for their constituencies.

PUBLIC AI IS NOT JUST HIGHLY-REGULATED AI

nor is it AI managed by private entities - even non-profits - that are not accountable to the public, nor is it military, national security, and other forms of AI deployed and operated by governments but not accessible to the public

PUBLIC AI HAS ADVANTAGES OVER PRIVATE AI

1. AI DEMANDS intensive capital investment, including in physical computational infrastructure and expensive fundamental research.

2. WHILE this barrier to entry might exclude new entrants, governments have access to the resources to compete with private firms. Governments, or public-private partnerships, have historically undertaken responsibility for large-scale infrastructure projects and for funding and coordinating the critical research that drives innovation.

3. PUBLIC AI projects could tap directly into these resources, rather than allowing the fruits of these public expenditures to be exclusively captured by private firms. Government-provided access to the capital necessary for AI development promotes efficiency and coordination instead of speculation and potentially dangerous competitive race dynamics between private actors.

4. GOVERNMENT is also in a better position than private companies to draw upon exclusive resources that will result in better models.

5. FOR EXAMPLE, public AI could leverage government data sets, benefit from legal exceptions and liability waivers that restrict private actors, and convincingly mobilize the public to contribute data or other resources for the public good. Public models also have more incentive to address bias and inequity early and often in the process.

PUBLIC AI

MUST BE

1. Publicly accessible
2. Publicly funded
3. Publicly accountable: governed and audited by a public body

SHOULD BE

Maintained in the public interest.

MAY BE

1. publicly provisioned
2. publicly inspectable and auditable
3. built on free and open components

COULD BE

a public option for large language models akin to public options for health insurance or banking

a national AI service akin to a national health service or a public highway administration

a publicly-funded effort to deploy many AI models for public and community use, akin to public libraries

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