

### POLICY MEMO #3

Winner (1980) and Biddle (2020) both draw attention to the ways in which technologies like machine learning systems are not “value-neutral.” They may reflect certain social priorities, require value-laden trade-offs, and/or have political consequences. You are an ethics consultant hired to analyze the values embedded in a machine learning system. Your job is to craft a policy memo that describes the system, discusses the values at play, and offers at least one practical recommendation for the future.

Your memo should make use of the framework provided by either Winner (1980) or Biddle (2020). However, you have a great deal of latitude otherwise: you may draw on any of the topics/readings we have discussed this semester. For instance, you might decide to write about how the system’s designer made particular assumptions about what kind of privacy is valuable and why (Westin 1968, Regan 1995). You might discuss how the system will likely have a disparate effect on different populations (Barocas and Selbst 2016). You might point out that the system strikes a particular balance between different fairness criteria or different types of transparency (Barocas et al. 2020, Rudin 2018, Zednik 2021). I am *not* suggesting that you tackle all of these topics, but merely providing examples of the ways in which you can use prior course readings in your analysis of the values embedded in your chosen system. I *strongly suggest* that you focus your analysis on just one topic or set of issues.

Your policy memo should be about a *real-life* example of an ML system or type of system. The only example you may not write about is a recidivism prediction algorithm like COMPAS (since that’s what Biddle himself analyzes). If you can’t think of an example of your own, you may use one of the ones we’ve talked about in class, e.g., StreetBump, Google’s ad targeting algorithm, Spotify’s recommender system, HireVue’s hiring algorithm, or AFST’s system for prediction of child abuse and neglect. You should *not* write about a system that you have already discussed in one of your two previous policy memos.

Your policy memo should contain the following sections:

- 1) **Background:** Briefly describe the machine learning system you have chosen to focus on. What is the purpose of the system? Provide a nontechnical description of what the system does and what it is used for.
- 2) **Theoretical Framework:** For this policy memo, you should use the framework provided by *either* Winner (1980) or Biddle (2020), but not both. Summarize the ideas/framework of either Winner or Biddle here, whichever you think is more helpful in thinking about the system you have chosen.
- 3) **Analysis of Values:** Use the framework you have just sketched to analyze the values embedded in your system of choice. You may choose to split this section up into subsections if you wish. Your focus in this section is entirely up to you.
- 4) **Practical Recommendation(s):** Formulate and defend at least one practical recommendations about how the values you have identified in the previous section should be managed or modified. Shoot for quality over quantity. It is likely that you will only have space to thoroughly explain and argue for one recommendation.

- 5) **References:** List all of the sources referenced in the policy memo. You may use any formatting style you like for your in-text citations and References section (APA, Chicago, etc.), as long as you are consistent. The References section should not be included in the word count.

*Course Readings:* Your policy memo should cite and make use of *at least two* of the readings that have been assigned in this class. One of those readings must be either Winner (1980) or Biddle (2020). Note that you need not agree with the texts that you cite.

*Header:* The header should contain the intended recipient of the memo and a brief description of the topic. The intended recipient of the memo is up to you. The header does not count toward the word count.

*Formatting and Length:* Your policy memo must be 1,000-1,200 words (not including References and header). It should be written in 12-point standard font like Times New Roman, have 1" margins, and be double-spaced.

*Deadline:* Due on Canvas by 11:59pm on Sunday, April 24<sup>th</sup>.

*Anonymous grading:* Your policy memo will be graded by Marshall anonymously. Please do not put your name anywhere in the document that you upload. Canvas will link your submission with your name.

*Plagiarism:* Plagiarism of any kind (including mosaic plagiarism and patchwriting) will not be tolerated. Please see the university's Academic Honor Policy for more information. If you have any questions about what constitutes acceptable use of other people's work, do not hesitate to get in touch with me or Marshall.