

The Citizenship of Sophia

As artificial intelligence becomes more prevalent in our society, from self-driving cars to smart assistants, an interesting issue has emerged for the legal community to debate. Should robots receive legal personhood, and if so, what are the implications of that decision? One way to examine this is through an example of a robot that already has citizenship. The British Council published an article specifically about this robot, *Should Robots be Citizens*, detailing her origin, and perhaps the future of citizenship for robots.¹ Sophia is a robot that was created by Hanson Robotics, a Hong Kong based company. Sophia is connected to the World Wide Web and is even able to imitate facial expressions through the use of artificial intelligence. In 2017, Saudi Arabia granted her full citizenship to their country.

Giving citizenship to a robot brings up a myriad of questions. The article gives a few examples, such as whether Sophia can marry, whether she has the ability to vote, and if she is capable of committing a crime. Other questions to consider with citizenship for robots as a whole is whether they are capable of being a guardian of a child, or whether they are capable of running for a public office. One example specific to the United States is whether a robot would be able to receive benefits from the government, like social security.

While some places are open to the idea of granting robots citizenship, or at least attempting to outline what that would look like in their society, like the European Parliament, others are greatly opposed. One argument against the idea of granting robots citizenship is the worry that it would have a negative impact on human civil rights. Another concern is that granting citizenship to a robot is simply not appropriate from an ethical, or a legal standpoint. Of course, Sophia by herself may seem to have relatively little risk, however it is important to think about the ramifications of thousands of robots that could be made similarly to her and receive the same citizenship. Again, this idea may worry some. However, it may seem beneficial to others who see opportunity in allowing robots to take on a more solid presence in society, whether that be by working dangerous jobs that humans may not want to risk taking part in anymore or by aiding in new technological advances.

While the United States has not granted citizenship to Sophia, or any other robot for that matter, the question of citizenship with robots is one that will likely linger and get more relevant as time goes on. For more information the article published by the British Council can be found [here](https://www.britishcouncil.org/anyone-anywhere/explore/digital-identities/robots-citizens).

¹ *Should robots be citizens?* BRITISH COUNCIL (Oct. 09, 2022), <https://www.britishcouncil.org/anyone-anywhere/explore/digital-identities/robots-citizens>.