The International Level:

ITU, ICANN and the Global Mega Monopolies

Seminar: Politics of Connectivity SoSe, 2026

Presenter: Jessica Hubbard

Overview

1. Key concepts of global digital governance

2. The main actors
   - ITU
   - ICANN
   - IGF
   - Global Mega Monopiles

Overview

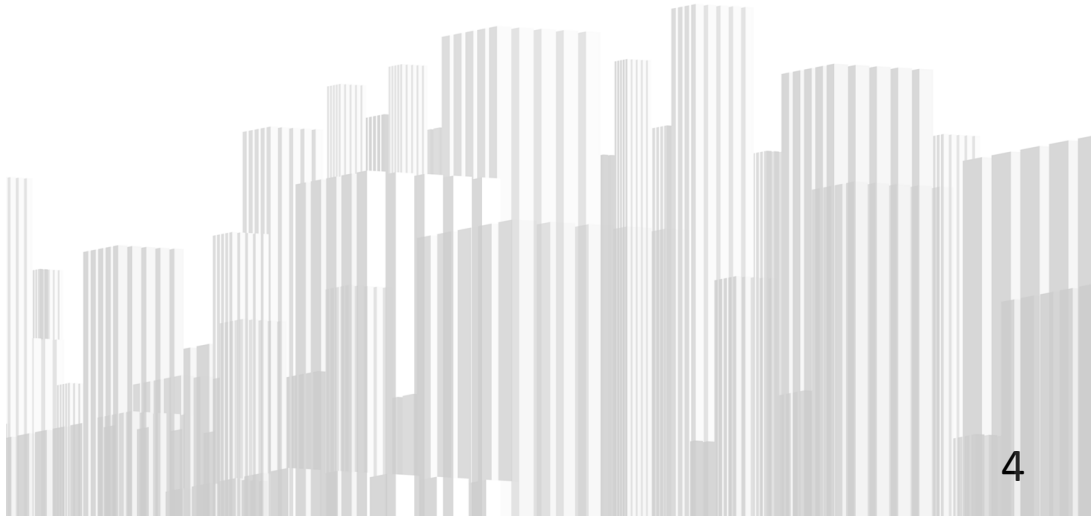
3 Hypothesis 1 *"**Internet governance** is increasingly shaped by competition between **multistakeholder institutions** (ICANN, IGF) and **state-centered governance** approaches promoted through the ITU."*

4 Hypothesis 2 *"Despite the existence of international governance institutions, **global digital infrastructures** are increasingly controlled by a small number of **technology corporations** whose influence rivals that of states."*

5 Hypothesis *3 "Efforts by states to increase **digital sovereignty** challenge the idea of a **single global Internet** and contribute to the **fragmentation of Internet governance**."*

6 Hypothesis 4 *"The future of the Internet will be determined by how successfully states, international institutions and global technology platforms balance **sovereignty, openness** and **economic power**."*

Overview



1 Why does global digital governance matter?

Global governance…

- …ensures global **connectivity** and **interoperability**.
- …manages scarce **communication resources**.
- …guides **economic development** and **innovation**.
- …addresses **security**, **sovereignty** and **digital rights**.

1 Key Concepts

- **Global Digital Infrastructure:** “The worldwide network of physical and technical systems that enable digital communications and internet services.”

- **Digital Sovereignty**: “The ability of a state or region to control its digital infrastructure, data, technologies and internet polices according to its own laws and interest.”

- **Internet Governance:** “The development and application by governments, the private sector and civil society, in their respective roles, of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and programmes that shape the evolution and use of the Internet.” – *IFG 2025, p.7*

1 Key Concepts

- **Multistakeholder Governance: “**A governance model in which government, private companies, technical experts, civil society and international organisations jointly participate in decision-making.“

- **Big Tech:** “A small group of multinational technology companies that dominate key digital markets and control essential internet platforms.”

- **Platform Power:** “The influence that large digital platforms have over communication, markets and information through their digital services and infrastructure.”

2 ITU (International Telecommunication Union)

Image 1

- Specialized agency of the United Nations
- Founded in 1865 as **International Telegraph Union**, name changed in 1947 = Oldest UN Agency
- 194 Member States (one-vote-per country) = Holy See
- 900 "sector members“ (companies, research organisations, telecommunications Organisations)

- ITU-R = ITU’s Radiocommunication Sector
- ITU-T = ITU’s Telecommunication Standardization Sector,
- ITU-D = ITU’s Telecommunication Development Sector

- Member-driven organization dominated by states
- Supports stronger governmental involvement in Internet governance

2 ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers)

Image 2

➢ **History**:

- Network Solutions Inc. (NSI) charged for Domain names, quasi-Monopoly, ICANN founded 1998 to break this
- Until 2016 operated under the supervision of the US National Telecommunications Administration (NTIA)

➢ **Maintenance work:**

- Coordinates the Domain Name System (DNS) and Top-level domains *.com* and *.uk; .in*; *.ru*.
- Allocates IP addresses, domain names, root management

- **To maintain "the operational stability, reliability, security, global interoperability, resilience, and openness of the DNS and the Internet" –ICANN 2022b**

2 ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers)

Image 2

- **Today:** Multistakeholder group and Nonprofit organisation based in the US, California.
- Has to comply with U.S. Office of **Foreign Assets Control (OFAC**) = 9/11, OFAC force assets

✓ Multistakeholder model
✓ Includes governments, businesses, technical experts and civil society

2 Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

Image 3

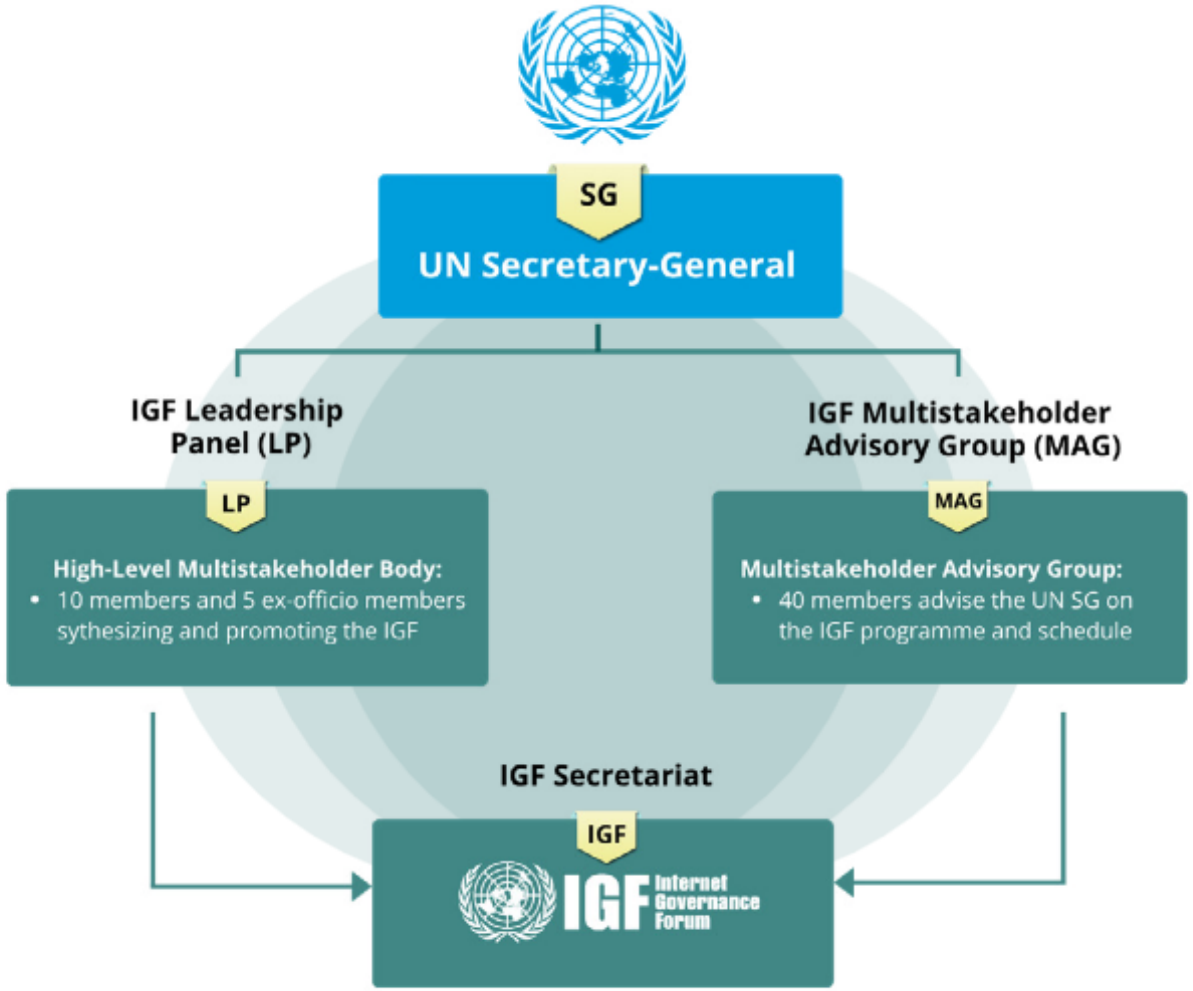
- Outcome of the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)
- Established by the Secretary-General in 2006

- Tunis Agreement §72 to §78 were extended by 10 years in 2015
- 20 annual meetings of the IFG since founding, 20th in Norway Lillestrøm

- Mandate reviewed in the WSIS+20 process in December 2025

This covers the costs of administration, fellowships and travel costs for MAG members from developing countries.

Image 4



IGF Structure and Working Mechanism

2 Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

Image 3

- Brings together all stake-holders (governments, companies and civil society)
- Platform for dialogue not a decision-making body

- Promotes cooperation on Internet governance issues
- Has a focus on the youth, capacity development, digital trust and resilience, sustainable and responsible innovation, universal access and digital rights, digital cooperation

Image 5

The Mandate of the IGF

a. Discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet.

b. Facilitate discourse between bodies dealing with different cross-cutting international public policies regarding the Internet and discuss issues that do not fall within the scope of any existing body.

c. Interface with appropriate intergovernmental organizations and other institutions on matters under their purview.

d. Facilitate the exchange of information and best practices, and in this regard make full use of the expertise of the academic, scientific and technical communities.

e. Advise all stakeholders in proposing ways and means to accelerate the availability and affordability of the Internet in the developing world.

f. Strengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and/or future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly those from developing countries.

g. Identify emerging issues, bring them to the attention of the relevant bodies and the general public, and, where appropriate, make recommendations.

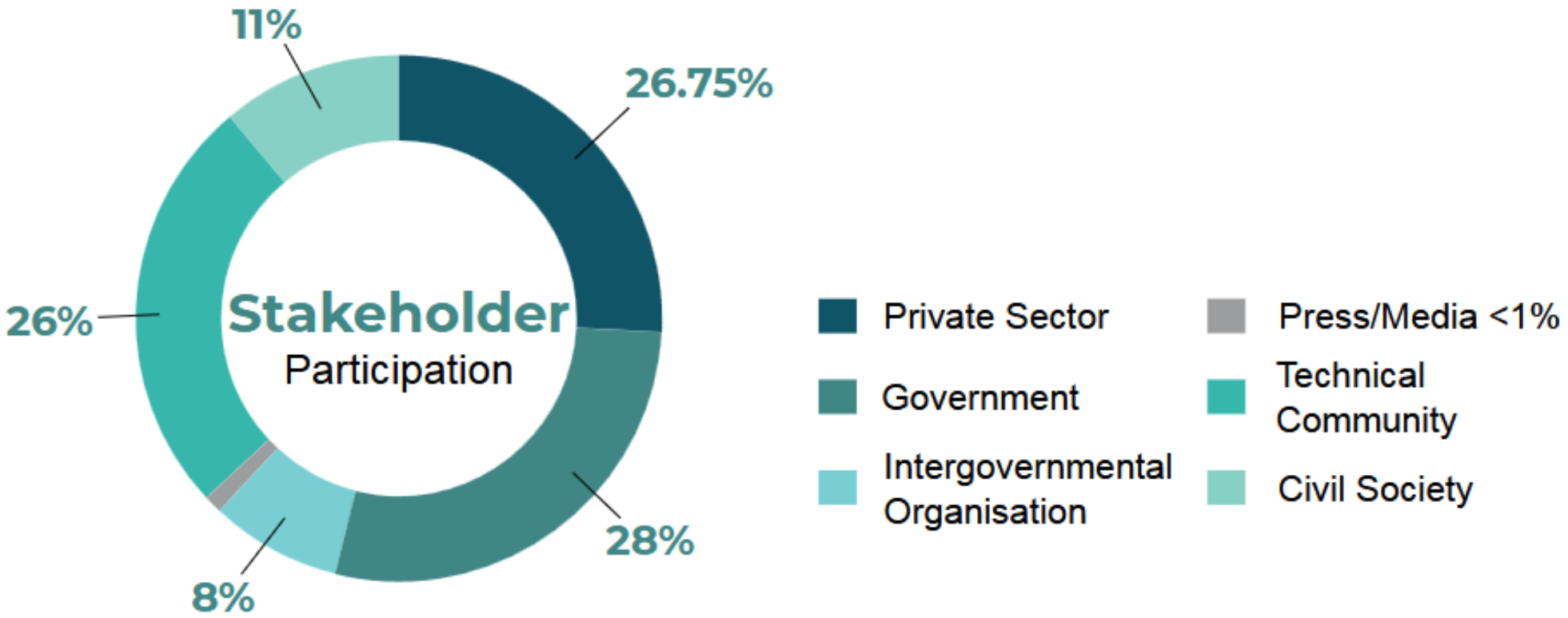
h. Contribute to capacity building for Internet governance in developing countries, drawing fully on local sources of knowledge and expertise.

i. Promote and assess, on an ongoing basis, the embodiment of WSIS principles in Internet governance processes.

j. Discuss, inter alia, issues relating to critical Internet resources.

k. Help to find solutions to the issues arising from the use and misuse of the Internet, of particular concern to everyday users.

l. Publish its proceedings.



IGF Participation by Stakeholder 2021-2024

Image 6

2 Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

Image 3

- From 3 to 5 days in length
- High-level meeting (senior policymakers, industry leaders, technical experts, civil society representatives)
- Since 2019: Sessions for Parliamentarians (lawmakers)
- Workshops
- 5,000 people on site, 5,000 online

➢ Intersessional activities:

- Policy Networks (on Artificial Intelligence; on Internet Fragmentation; on Meaningful Access)
- Best practice forums
- Dynamic Coalitions (on Internet Universality; Internet Standards, Security and Safety ; Accessibility and Disability)

2 Global Mega Monopolies

- Examples: Microsoft, Apple, Meta, Amazon, Google

- Control key digital infrastructures
- Possess enormous amounts of data
- Influence communication and information flows

- Operate across national borders
- Engage in Global Governance through institutions and through practice

Image 7


Image 8

Image 9


Image 10


Image 11

3 Hypothesis 1

"Internet governance is increasingly shaped by competition between multistakeholder institutions (ICANN, IGF) and state-centered governance approaches promoted through the ITU."

Multistakeholder Model

- Represented by ICANN and the IGF
- Includes governments, companies, technical experts and civil society
- Emphasizes openness and global cooperation

State-Centered Model

- Favored by states seeking greater sovereignty
- Governments demand stronger control over Internet resources
- ITU often serves as a forum for these debates
- OFAC "hidden state control" of ICANN

Internet governance is increasingly a struggle between openness and state control.

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3 Hypothesis 1 – Example: WSIS + 20 Review (2025)

- The biggest Internet governance event of the last few years was the **WSIS+20 Review** at the United Nations in 2025

- Governments debated the future of Internet governance and whether institutions such as ICANN and the IGF should remain central or whether states should gain a stronger role

- The GA Resolution A/Res/80/173 welcomes the IGF's "***evolution from an annual meeting to a broader ecosystem"*** and decides that the IGF "***shall be made a permanent forum of the United Nations***" and that it should "***further reinforce its intersessional work***"

4 Hypothesis 2

“Despite the existence of international governance institutions, global digital infrastructures are increasingly controlled by a small number of technology corporations whose influence rivals that of states.”

Concentration of Power
- Few companies dominate search, social media and cloud services
- Large market shares create dependency

Control of Infrastructure
- Cloud computing
- Digital platforms
- Data centers
- Online advertising ecosystems

Political Influence
- Ability to shape public discourse
- Influence regulation through lobbying
- Set de facto global standard

Corporate power has become a central factor in global Internet governance.

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4 Hypothesis 2 – Example: Cloud Computing

- Provided by Amazon (AWS), Microsoft (Azure) and Google (Google Cloud). Most Websites are hosted on infrastructure owned by these few companies
- Change in Pricing, Security Rules, acceptable user policies and access to its services impact millions of users worldwide
- Big Tech power clashes with state and people interests

5 Hypothesis 3

“Efforts by states to increase digital sovereignty challenge the idea of a single global Internet and contribute to the fragmentation of Internet governance.”

Digital Sovereignty

- States seek greater control over data and networks
- National cybersecurity concerns are increasing

Consequences

- Emergence of different regulatory regimes
- Risk of a "Splinternet“
- Reduced global interoperability

National sovereignty increasingly competes with the idea of a borderless Internet.

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5 Hypothesis 3 – Example: Russia

- Development of sovereign Internet capabilities; 2019 Law to establish a domestic internet = “sovereign internet law”
- Attempts to reduce dependence on foreign infrastructure = Russian Information Security Doctrine since 2011
- Increase state control over digital communication = Power to disconnect internet at will (Akin to the Chinese “Great Firewall”)
- Analysts increasingly describe this as part of the emergence of a "Splinternet.“

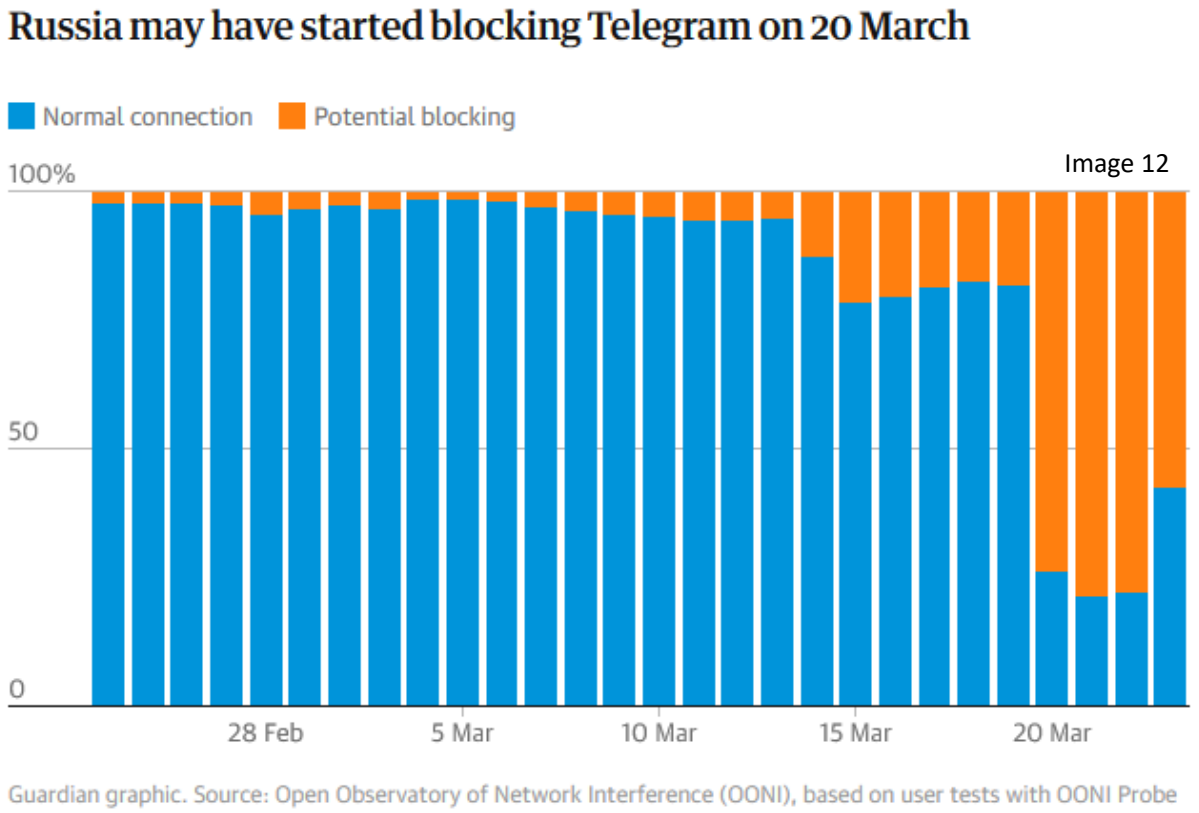

Image 12

National sovereignty increasingly competes with the idea of a borderless Internet.

5 Hypothesis 3 – Example: Russia

- Moving away from the idea of a single global Internet toward a nationally controlled Internet ecosystem
- Russia is trying to influence the ITU; as it is an organisation that favours member state power. Wanting to establish "*international control over the Internet using the monitoring and supervisory capabilities of the International Telecommunication Union*." – Putin 2011
- Limited alignment with China on these matters
- **Russia-Ukraine War:** March 9th, 2022, Russia was banned from election to ITU study group positions and to all WTSA-20 vice chair positions

6 Hypothesis 4

“The future of the Internet will be determined by how successfully states, international institutions and global technology platforms balance sovereignty, openness and economic power.”

States
- Demand security and sovereignty

International Organizations
- Seek global coordination and stability

Coporations
- Pursue innovation and economic interests

Future Challenges
- AI governance
- Cybersecurity
- Data governance
- Digital rights
- Cross-border regulation

No single actor can govern the Internet alone. Future Internet governance will depend on cooperation between governments, international organizations and technology companies.

6 Hypothesis 4 – Example: Limited foreign access to Anthropic AI Models

*"Anthropic said it will "abruptly disable" its most advanced AI models for all users after the **US government ordered it** to suspend access to the models for foreign nationals, citing national security concerns. (…) The action also marks a **major escalation of US efforts to halt foreign adversaries**' AI capabilities. For years, US export controls have focused on the chips and tools that power AI rather than on restricting foreign access to AI itself."* – The Guardian, 13 June 2026

- Fable and Mythos were fully shut down for any non-US citizens
- AI governance has become the new frontier of Internet governance
- The US Governance restricted with little to no explanation, beyond "national security concerns"

- **What consequences do single state actions such as these have on the believability and future of global AI governance**?

No single actor can govern the Internet alone. Future Internet governance will depend on cooperation between governments, international organizations and technology companies.

6 Hypothesis 4 – Example: Global AI Governance

12:30 - 13:00 Youth stage ✓ Leaders ✓ Gold ✓ Discovery Panel

Youth shaping the future of human-centered AI

This high level fireside chat will bring together voices from across the international community, private sector, and academia to explore how young people can be empowered to lead in the design, Policy, and use of...

11:10 - 11:40 Centre stage ✓ Leaders ✓ Gold Panel

AI and human rights

10:00 - 10:20 Centre stage ✓ Leaders ✓ Gold Panel

From principles to practice: The role of international standards in AI

As AI reshapes economies and societies, global principles around ethics, safety, and trust are taking shape. But principles alone are not enough. To scale AI responsibly across borders, sectors, and technologies, they must be translated...

14:00 - 17:15 Room S ✓ Leaders ✓ Gold ✓ Discovery Workshop

AI for early warnings for all: From innovation to impact

Hosted by the AI Group of the Early Warning for All (EW4All) initiative, this workshop will convene policymakers, technologists, humanitarian actors, and climate experts to explore how operational artificial intelligence (AI) applications are strengthening multi-hazard...

11:30 - 12:00 Centre stage ✓ Leaders ✓ Gold Panel

Bridging the AI infrastructure divide

A widening infrastructure gap is beginning to emerge as artificial intelligence reshapes economies and societies. From limited access to compute power, data centres, and reliable connectivity, to high energy costs, financing barriers, and unequal access...

Images 13

7 Conclusion

1. Internet governance is increasingly a struggle between openness and state control.

2. Corporate power has become a central factor in global Internet governance.

3. National sovereignty increasingly competes with the idea of a borderless Internet.

4. No single actor can govern the Internet alone.
Future Internet governance will depend on cooperation between governments, international organizations and technology companies.

6 Discussion

1. Should the Internet be governed primarily by governments (e.g., through the ITU) or by the multistakeholder model (e.g., ICANN and the IGF)?

2. How should big tech influence be handled by international institutions?

3. Is a certain degree of digital sovereignty necessary for national security, or does is its threat to the idea of a free and open Internet to great?

4. If you had to choose one or multiple actors to govern the Internet, who would you trust the most and why?

8 Image Sources

- Image 1: https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2026/
- Image 2: https://logodix.com/logos/1985811
- Image 3: https://cdt.org/event/global-internet-governance-forum-2022-un-human-rights-office-open-forum/
- Image 4: **Internet Governance Forum (2025**) “IGF Achievements and Impacts (2005-2025)”, p.14.
- Image 5: **Internet Governance Forum (2025**) “IGF Achievements and Impacts (2005-2025)”, p.12.
- Image 6: **Internet Governance Forum (2025**) “IGF Achievements and Impacts (2005-2025)”, p.21.
- Image 7: https://logodownload.org/microsoft-logo/
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- Image 13: https://aiforgood.itu.int/summit26/

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