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# Internet governance in the digital world

*Rapid digitalisation, propelled by advances in artificial intelligence, has reshaped the global economy and society – but it has also brought a host of challenges that the G7 is well poised to help address*

Today, the internet connects more than 5.3 billion people and is a shared resource on which society depends. It was created on the premise that free and broad access to information supports the greater good. The complexity and scale of the internet, and its ever-increasing number of users, demand that it be governed transparently and through a globally inclusive process. Recent rapid digitalisation, propelled by advances in artificial intelligence, has reshaped the global economy and society. While offering benefits such as enhanced connectivity, improved business efficiency and greater access to information, this transformation has also brought a host of challenges, including cybersecurity threats, privacy concerns and the widening of the digital divide. These developments necessitate a robust, globally representative governance framework.

One example of its complexity and its role in network coordination is the Domain Name System, which

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enables people to navigate the internet. Each device on the internet uses an internet protocol address, which is difficult to remember because it is a long series of numbers, or numbers and letters. These 'unique identifiers' are aligned with the protocol parameters that ensure networks can communicate with each other. The DNS helps users navigate the internet by translating the numbers into memorable names.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, a non-profit, public benefit organisation, is specifically responsible for overseeing the global DNS infrastructure. It ensures the stable and secure operation of the internet's unique identifiers systems and coordinates the allocation and assignment of names in the root zone of the DNS through its Internet Assigned Numbers Authority functions.

ICANN is accountable to stakeholders worldwide and works with technical partners in the internet ecosystem



# 5.3<sup>bn</sup>

people connected by  
the internet

community faces today. This confusion could exacerbate potential future fragmentation of the technical internet infrastructure, a concern that was raised in the G7 declaration in March 2024. Such misapprehensions and related discussions about the governance of the internet and its content could well dominate the 20-year review of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS+20) taking place in 2025. This would detract from critical issues of advancing global internet development and expanding digital transformation.

The technical infrastructure of the internet is functioning well and should not be confused with content and communications issues. This distinction underscores the need to preserve the values that have made the Internet an innovation engine. Achieving this goal necessitates constant commitment, collaboration and trust.

#### LOOKING AHEAD

WSIS+20 presents a crucial opportunity to reaffirm the commitment to a multi-stakeholder approach. This approach is vital for ensuring inclusive and effective governance of global internet infrastructure and avoiding the pitfalls of conflating technical elements with content governance.

As the G7 leaders convene, they have a critical role in reaffirming their support for the work of organisations like ICANN. Our shared goal must be to reduce barriers to participation, not to raise fences.

Ultimately, navigating the evolving digital landscape requires concerted efforts and collaboration on a global scale. By prioritising security, stability and inclusivity, policymakers and stakeholders pave the way for a digital ecosystem that benefits everyone. <sup>G7</sup>



#### SALLY COSTERTON

Sally Costerton is the interim president and CEO of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, and has served as senior advisor to the president and senior vice president for Global Stakeholder Engagement since 2012. Prior to joining ICANN, she was CEO of Europe, Middle East and Africa for Hill & Knowlton. Throughout her career, Sally has worked with diverse international companies and senior leaders to maximise their resources and build strong relationships with their stakeholders. She is an experienced board director, including roles as board chair.

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to evolve and enforce the rules that ensure one secure, stable, interoperable internet. ICANN operates using a multi-stakeholder model, one of the most representative forms of policymaking. Through this approach, ICANN fosters collaboration among governments, the private sector, civil society, academia and the technical community, ensuring diverse perspectives are considered in the development of internet-related policies. ICANN's Governmental Advisory Committee, with 182 members and 38 intergovernmental organisations as observers, is the voice of governments and IGOs within ICANN's processes.

#### ADVANCES AND CHALLENGES

The challenges to internet governance are varied and significant, with implications that could negatively affect the future development and inclusivity of the internet. ICANN has made significant strides in adapting the DNS to the demands of a changing digital landscape. It has expanded the number of top-level domains to include words in non-Latin scripts – increasing accessibility and inclusivity worldwide. ICANN also is actively working to enhance DNS security against increasing cyber threats and ensuring that technical internet governance policies respond to the needs of a global user base.

However, challenges remain. Conflating applications or content with the technical infrastructure of the internet is one of the main challenges the technical