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Internet Governance: the latest in the debate over who controls the internet
Blog Editor

This blog has been active in commenting the issues sorrounding [internet governance](#) and its discussions [post WCIT](#) in Dubai last year. In this piece, **Dominique Lazanski** *reports the latests debates that have just taken place in May around the fight for the control of the internet.*

Internet governance is a hot topic at the moment. In the run up to the International Telecommunications Union's World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT) last December, the idea of Internet governance became more widely known among the many who don't participate in the concept as part of work or research. I've just come back from the ITU in Geneva where the [World Telecommunication/ICT Policy Forum](#) (WTPF) and the [World Summit on the Information Society](#) (WSIS) went on [concurrently](#). These events were the latest in the debate over who controls the internet.

The WCIT was a watershed moment in Internet governance. [It was about the Internet, but wasn't](#), but was in the end. Intense discussions went on for two weeks over issues like security, spam, and broadband connections. At the end of the day the International Telecommunication Regulations, a treaty, was not signed by a number of countries that couldn't live with proscriptive regulations. The WTPF this last week was the first time since the WCIT that the delegations met again to discuss a number of the issues. But the WTPF was not a treaty making conference and it only lasted three days. Quite a different experience than in December.

At the WTPF a discussion of six different opinions took place. The opinions were non-controversial and involved general and topical policy issues like IXP creation and IPv6 transition. The last two opinions, however, sought to define the multistakeholder approach to Internet governance. Multistakeholderism, as defined by the Tunis Agenda in the mid-2000s, is the idea that the all participants in the Internet – from governments, to civil society to the private sector and beyond – have a role to play in how the Internet is governed and managed. This is not a new approach, but the controversy last week was the introduction of a new, formal opinion on the role of government in the multistakeholder approach to Internet governance.

It is no surprise to anyone that governments are increasingly taking a lesser role in control over the Internet, though many countries do manage and maintain rather strict power over their internal Internet connections. However this situation at the WTPF speaks to a wider and [ongoing set of issues](#) that are occurring beyond just the conferences and conventions. Among many issues, the fact that ICANN is still a US based organization does not sit well with the Middle East and [Latin American countries](#). The debate could fill more than a few phd dissertations, but there remains much tension over which organizations control domain names.

What does all of this mean at this point in time? As I mentioned, in parallel with the WTPF was the [WSIS forum](#) that discussed the review to take place in 2015 of the WSIS goals. During that event stories about how transparency and Internet governance is evolving in different countries for different cultures and different governments emerged. Though many governments do not support freedom as an underlying priority, it became clear to me how far the world has progressed in terms of connectivity and access. However, public choice theory tells us that governments are driven by the interests of government officials, bureaucrats and special interest parties that seek to gain rewards, often in the form of power. The fight between governments and users of the Internet is far from over.

The current approach to Internet governance remains the [multistakeholder model](#), but there will be many more discussions of the role of government in this model especially from governments who continue to loose control over their citizens. But the situation is more nuanced than that. Some governments are adopting the language of freedom online for their own, very different ends. It will be interesting to see how this continues to play out in international Internet governance fora.

This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of LSE Network Economy Blog nor of the London School of Economics.

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About the Author

Dominique Lazanski is a London-based digital policy and strategy freelance consultant and works on digital policy for the TaxPayers' Alliance. She has spent over 13 years in the Internet industry with many of those years working in Silicon Valley for the likes of Yahoo!, eBay and Apple. She has a long held interest in Internet governance and recently attended the ITU's WCIT

as part of the official UK delegation. She has written and spoken on digital issues over the years from a free market and entrepreneurial perspective. She holds degrees from Cornell University and the London School of Economics and currently sits on the Open Data User Group board in the Cabinet Office and the Tax Transparency Board in HMRC. She is currently working on her PhD.

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