
UNIT 18 INTERNET GOVERNANCE

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18.0 INTRODUCTION

The history of Internet governance spans several decades and is quite interesting. Technological advancements, policy debates, and the evolution of global collaboration characterise it. This section will discover the key milestones and significant events that have shaped Internet governance.

18.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- outline the history of Internet governance;
- analyse the importance of Internet governance;
- explore critical organisations involved in Internet governance;
- discuss landmark decisions and policies that have influenced Internet governance globally;
- analyse internet governance in the context of a specific country, such as India;
- investigate conflicts and challenges related to Internet governance; and
- examine notable civic movements and advocacy efforts in the field of Internet governance.

18.2 HISTORY OF INTERNET GOVERNANCE

18.2.1 The Emergence of the Internet

The attempts at Internet governance can be traced back to the humble beginnings of computer networking. In the 1960s, the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) of the United States Department of Defense, in groundbreaking work, developed ARPANET. This was a network that connected computers at various research institutions. This laid the foundation for the development of the Internet.

18.2.2 Informal Governance

The existing governance mechanisms were relatively informal when the Internet expanded in the 1970s and 1980s. Researchers and engineers collaborated through organisations like the Internet Engineering Task Force

(IETF) to develop and standardise protocols for Internet operation. The emphasis was on open participation and a bottom-up decision-making approach.

18.2.3 Formation of ICANN

The need for a more formalised governance structure became apparent as the Internet gained popularity and commercial significance in the 1990s. In 1998, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) was established as a nonprofit organisation domain name system (DNS) management, IP address allocation, and protocol parameters.

18.2.4 Role of the United States of America

One significant aspect of Internet governance has been the authority retention over the administration of the Internet's root zone file and the assignment of unique IP addresses under the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) (an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce).

18.2.5 Globalisation and Internationalisation

As the Internet became a global phenomenon, calls for a more international approach to govern the Internet grew louder. Hence, arguments concerning the inconsistency of the United States' unilateral control with the global nature of the Internet emerged. This led to efforts to take internet governance to an international level and increase the participation of other stakeholders' participation.

18.2.6 World Summit on the Information Society

In 2003 and 2005, the United Nations organised the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) to unite governments, civil society organisations, the private sector, and technical communities. The WSIS facilitated discussions on Internet governance, eventually forming the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), a multi-stakeholder forum for policy dialogue.

18.2.7 The Montevideo Statement and the IANA Transition

The year 2013 was a critical juncture regarding the role of the U.S. government in governing the Internet. The revelations of widespread surveillance activities by intelligence agencies stimulated the concern for a more globalised and decentralised governance model for the Internet. Consequently, various internet organisations, including ICANN, released the Montevideo Statement, expressing the need to accelerate the globalisation of ICANN to manage the internet infrastructure. This led to the emergence of IANA (Internet Assigned Numbers Authority) in 2016, transferring the control and management of the key Internet functions from the United States to the global Internet community.

Activity 1

Look for media reports on the Mass Surveillance of 2013 by the United States.

- How was this mass surveillance conducted?
- Was this a case of exploitation? If yes, how?
- How does it help to understand that Internet governance is important?

18.3 IMPORTANCE OF INTERNET GOVERNANCE

18.3.1 Stable and Secure Internet

Internet governance is crucial in ensuring a stable and secure global network. It does so by:

- establishing and enforcing technical standards and protocols,
- addressing cybersecurity threats and
- managing essential internet resources such as IP addresses and domain names.

Thus, Internet governance helps to maintain a reliable and secure digital infrastructure needed for a more connected world.

18.3.2 For an Open and Innovative Global Platform

An important feature of Internet governance is facilitating an open and innovative digital environment. It aims to do so through a policy framework that supports:

- net neutrality,
- freedom of expression,
- and fair competition.

It aims to be egalitarian by allowing individuals, businesses, and organisations to freely create, share, and access information and services on the Internet.

18.3.3 User Rights and Privacy

The prime concern of Internet governance is the rights and privacy of Internet users. Policies and regulations have been developed to:

- safeguard personal data,
- promote transparency, and
- provide mechanisms for redressal in case of violations.

This is aimed at building trust and maintaining the confidence of individuals in the digital world.

18.3.4 For Global Collaboration and Cooperation

The Internet's global reach requires international cooperation and collaboration among various stakeholders. Internet governance aids dialogue and coordination amongst:

- governments,
- civil society,
- technical communities, and
- the private sector.

This eventually helps to address common challenges, develop policies, and shape the future of the Internet collaboratively and inclusively.

Activity 2

Try to find out why the following are important internet resources.

- IP Address
- Domain Name System

18.4 KEY ORGANISATIONS IN INTERNET GOVERNANCE

18.4.1 Internet Governance Forum (IGF)

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) resulted in the establishment of The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in 2006. The IGF acts as a global platform for dialogue and collaboration on issues related to Internet governance. It convenes stakeholders from various sectors to:

- discuss policy-related issues,
- share best practices, and
- address emerging challenges in an egalitarian manner.

18.4.2 Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)

ICANN is a pivotal organisation for Internet governance. It manages domain names, IP addresses, and protocol parameters.

It follows a multi-stakeholder model, which promotes the participation of governments, the private sector, technical experts, civil society organisations, and individual internet users.

ICANN plays a pivotal role in ensuring the stability and security of the Internet through its policies and decisions that shape the domain name system worldwide.



Key Organisations for Internet Governance

18.4.3 Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF)

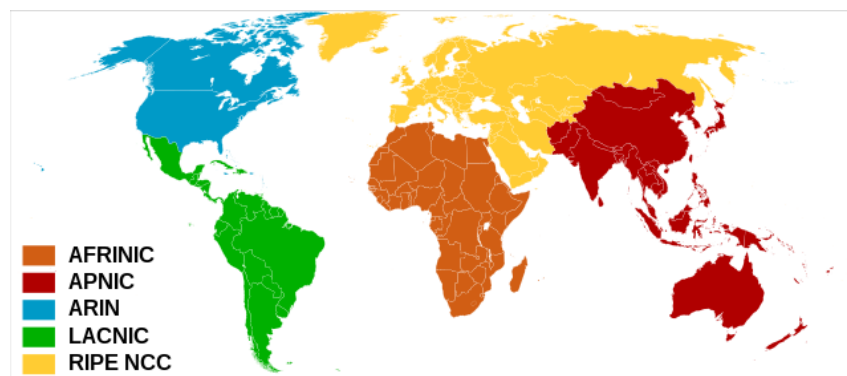
The Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) is a community comprising technical experts, engineers, and researchers across the globe. IETF is concerned with the development and standardisation of Internet protocols. The IETF also tries to ensure operability and seamless communication across networks. Through an open and collaborative process, the IETF produces standards based on consensus that guide the functioning of the Internet worldwide.

18.4.4 World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)

The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) is an international community to develop the standards for the World Wide Web. Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the web, has led it. It tries to ensure the World Wide Web remains open, accessible, and interoperable. W3C has played a significant role in shaping the evolution of the web by developing and promoting technical specifications and guidelines for it.

18.4.5 Regional Internet Registries (RIRs)

Regional Internet Registries (RIRs) are responsible for the allocation and management of IP addresses within specific regions all around the world. There are five RIRs worldwide, each serving a designated geographical area. To ensure an efficient allocation and distribution of IP addresses in a specific region, the registries work closely with network operators, internet service providers, and other stakeholders of that region.



Map of Regional Internet Registries (Source: Wikipedia)

Activity 3

Now that you have a brief idea of the prominent organisations involved in Internet governance, it is time to know more about them.

1. Find out which are the five Regional Internet Registries.
2. Visit the website of ICANN and look for the services provided by them related to domain names.

18.5 LANDMARK DECISIONS IN INTERNET GOVERNANCE

18.5.1 Net Neutrality Regulations

The guiding principle for net neutrality is that all the traffic on the Internet should be treated equally, without any discrimination or preferential treatment by Internet service providers (ISPs). Several countries have implemented net neutrality regulations to preserve an open and level playing field on the Internet. There have been landmark decisions and regulations for net neutrality to prevent discrimination and ensure equal access. They have influenced how ISPs manage and deliver internet services around the globe.

18.5.2 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) was implemented by the European Union (EU). Put simply, and it is a comprehensive framework for data protection and privacy. It sets strict guidelines for collecting, storing, and processing personal data. The GDPR has had a significant impact on internet governance policies globally. It influences data protection practices, user consent mechanisms, and privacy regulations.

18.5.3 Safe Harbor and Privacy Shield Agreements

The Safe Harbor and Privacy Shield agreements were arrangements between the European Union and the United States. It is intended to facilitate the transfer of personal data between the two regions and ensure adequate data protection standards simultaneously. These agreements faced legal challenges, eventually leading to discussions on cross-border data flows, privacy frameworks, and compliance with data protection laws.

18.5.4 Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policies

To ensure fair and efficient resolution of the conflicts related to the domain names, Domain Name Dispute Resolution Policies, such as the Uniform Domain-Name Dispute-Resolution Policy (UDRP), exist. These policies have played a pivotal role in addressing the conflicts related to trademark infringement, cybersquatting, and disputes related to domain name ownership.

18.5.5 Copyright and Intellectual Property Rights

Copyright and Intellectual Property Rights have been among the critical concerns of Internet governance. Notable decisions, such as the Digital

Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) in the United States and the Copyright Directive in the European Union, have shaped policies and regulations related to copyright infringement on the Internet, digital content distribution, and the responsibilities of Internet intermediaries.

18.5.6 Cybersecurity and Anti-Spam Measures

- Considering the rise in cases of cyberattacks and spam globally, various countries have implemented laws and regulations to enhance cybersecurity and combat unsolicited commercial emails. Some noteworthy decisions and policies have been guiding the development of:
 - cybersecurity frameworks
 - incident response mechanisms, and
 - measures to protect and increase awareness of individuals and organisations from online threats.

Activity 4

1. Look for five news items related to net neutrality in your country. What do they say?
2. Godaddy.com was in the news for the domain name dispute. Try to find out what happened and what the dispute was about.
3. Read about the landmark judgment in the case of Sameer Wadekar & Anr. Vs Netflix Entertainment Services Pvt. Ltd

18.6 INTERNET GOVERNANCE IN INDIA

18.6.1 Overview of Internet Landscape in India

Internet connectivity and usage have increased drastically in recent years in India. With the largest population in the world and a thriving digital economy, internet governance in India is a critical area of focus. This section provides an overview of the internet landscape in India, including internet penetration, digital initiatives, and the regulatory framework.

18.6.2 Legal Framework for Internet Governance

The Information Technology Act of 2000 and its subsequent amendments provide the legal framework for Internet governance in India. This section explores the key provisions and regulations related to cybersecurity, data protection, intermediary liability, and other aspects of Internet governance in the Indian context.

18.6.3 Digital India Initiative

The Indian government launched the Digital India Initiative to transform the country into a digitally empowered society and a knowledge economy. This section highlights the key components of the Digital India program, including

- efforts to enhance internet connectivity,
- promote e-governance,

- foster digital literacy, and
- leverage technology for social and economic development.

18.6.4 Role of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has a crucial role in shaping internet governance policies in the country. As a regulatory body for the telecommunications sector, TRAI influences issues related to:

- net neutrality,
- data privacy,
- quality of service, and
- consumer protection.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1. What are the key events that contributed to the history of Internet governance?

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2. Why is Internet governance important?

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3. Identify key organisations in Internet governance and their roles.

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18.7 INTERNET GOVERNANCE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

There are various challenges to achieving an egalitarian internet.

The prime concern is balancing the public good and governance practices simultaneously. The significant challenges regarding

- freedom of expression with content regulation,

- ensuring data protection and privacy,
- bridging the digital divide and
- addressing cybersecurity threats.

18.8 CONFLICTS AND CHALLENGES IN INTERNET GOVERNANCE

This section explores the conflicts related to Internet governance and the ongoing efforts to address them.

18.8.1 Government Surveillance and Privacy Concerns

One of the ongoing conflicts related to Internet governance revolves around government surveillance and privacy. Balancing the need for national security with individual privacy rights poses significant challenges. Consequently, this led to debates on user privacy susceptible to breach

- surveillance practices,
- data collection by intelligence agencies and
- the implementation of encryption standards.

18.8.2 Content Regulation and Freedom of Expression

Internet governance also tussles with balancing content regulation and freedom of expression. Determining the boundaries of permissible online content while upholding the principles of free speech and avoiding censorship is a delicate balance. Governments and online platforms confront complex decisions regarding hate speech, disinformation, and harmful content, simultaneously safeguarding individuals' right to express their opinions.

18.8.3 Cybersecurity Threats and Responses

The ever-evolving landscape of cybersecurity poses significant challenges to Internet governance. The surge in cyberattacks, data breaches, and ransomware incidents necessitates robust security measures and international cooperation. To address the current challenges in ensuring a secure digital environment, the following is required:

- Developing effective cybersecurity frameworks,
- promoting best practices, and addressing vulnerabilities.

18.8.4 Digital Divide and Access to the Internet

The digital divide refers to the disparity in internet access and connectivity across geographical regions and populations. Bridging this divide and ensuring equitable access to the Internet remains a challenge in Internet governance. The vision is to ensure that all individuals can benefit from the opportunities the Internet provides. The digital divide could be addressed by focusing on:

- expand infrastructure,

- reduce costs, and
- promote digital inclusion

18.8.5 Jurisdictional Issues and Global Cooperation

Besides the challenges mentioned above, Internet governance encounters jurisdictional challenges.

The reason is the reach of the Internet that transcends national boundaries. Hence, conflicts emerge when legal frameworks and regulations differ between countries because they affect cross-border data flows, content distribution, and jurisdictional claims. Resolving jurisdictional issues and fostering global cooperation simultaneously is a challenge and crucial for a harmonised and consistent approach to Internet governance.

18.9 CIVIC MOVEMENTS AND INTERNET GOVERNANCE

The role of civic movements for fair practices in Internet governance must be addressed. They have contributed significantly to raising awareness, shaping policies, and advocating for a more open, inclusive, and user-centric approach to Internet governance. Through their activism and engagement, they strive to safeguard digital rights, protect privacy, and promote a free and accessible internet for all. Civic movements have played a role in global Internet governance debates. Following are a few notable areas that civic movements related to and hence can be categorised as below:

1. Net Neutrality Advocacy:

Various civic movements and advocacy groups have emerged worldwide to promote and uphold net neutrality. These movements mobilise public support, organise protests, and engage in online activism to raise awareness about preserving an open and neutral internet.

2. Digital Rights and Privacy Movements:

With the increasing digitisation of our lives, movements focused on digital rights and privacy. These movements called for protecting individuals' rights to privacy, free expression, and access to information in the digital realm. They advocate for strong data protection laws, challenge government surveillance practices, and raise awareness about privacy issues and digital freedoms.

3. Open Source and Free Software Movements:

The open-source and free software movements promote the use and development of software that can be freely accessed, modified, and distributed. These movements emphasise the importance of transparency, collaboration, and user empowerment in software development. They advocate for adopting open standards, open-source licensing, and community-driven software development models, promoting innovation and accessibility in the digital space.

4. Access to Internet Movements:

There is still limited access to the Internet in many parts of the world, particularly in marginalised communities and rural areas. Movements focused on access to the internet advocate for universal connectivity and work towards bridging the digital divide. These movements seek to expand internet infrastructure, reduce costs, and promote initiatives that provide internet access to underserved populations, empowering them with the opportunities and benefits of digital connectivity.

5. Digital Rights Movements in Authoritarian Regimes:

In countries with authoritarian regimes, civic movements have emerged to defend digital rights and fight against censorship, surveillance, and online repression. These movements often operate in challenging environments, using encryption tools, anonymous communication platforms, and other technologies to protect activists, journalists, and citizens from state surveillance and repression.

6. Global Internet Governance Debates:

Advocacy for inclusive and participatory decision-making processes, calling for the involvement of civil society organisations and individual internet users in shaping internet policies. These movements often engage in advocacy, public consultations, and grassroots mobilisation to ensure that the voices of diverse stakeholders are heard in global Internet governance discussions.

Activity 4

Now you have read about the areas of advocacy related to Internet governance, try to look for any specific civic society movement in the following areas:

1. Digital Rights in an authoritarian state
2. Open source software
3. Net Neutrality
4. Digital rights and privacy

18.10 RANKING OF COUNTRIES IN INTERNET GOVERNANCE

18.10.1 Methodologies for Ranking Internet Governance

Different organisations use different methodologies to evaluate and rank countries. The desirable parameters for fair Internet governance include openness, security, privacy, and inclusivity.

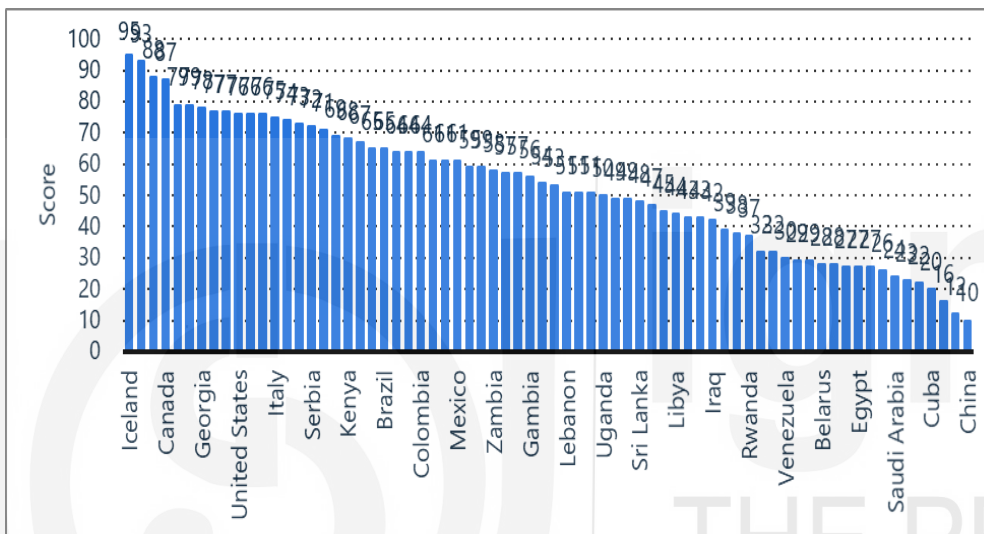
Ranking countries based on their Internet governance policies involves assessing factors like:

- legal frameworks,
- regulatory environments,
- infrastructure,

- cybersecurity measures,
- data protection regulations, and
- access to digital services.

18.10.2 Examples of Countries with Strong Internet Governance Policies

Several countries have developed strong Internet governance policies. Countries like Sweden, Germany, Estonia, and the Netherlands have been recognised for their progressive approach to digital rights, privacy protection, and promoting an open and secure Internet environment. These countries prioritise digital infrastructure, invest in cybersecurity measures, and emphasise individual privacy rights.



Degree of Internet freedom in selected countries according to the Freedom House Index in 2022 (index points) **Source(s):** Freedom House; [ID 272533](#)

18.10.3 Challenges in Assessing and Comparing Internet Governance

Assessing and comparing Internet governance across countries is challenging due to the dynamic and diverse nature of the digital landscape, along with different kinds of regulatory approaches. Cultural, social, and political contexts significantly influence Internet governance policies, which makes direct comparisons complex. Also, the constantly evolving technology requires regular updates to evaluate the methodologies used to assess Internet government practices.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: 1) Use the space provided below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1. What are some landmark decisions in Internet governance?

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2. How is Internet governance handled in India?

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3. What are the main challenges and opportunities in Internet governance?

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18.11 LET US SUM UP

The history of Internet governance has witnessed the evolution of organisations, policies, and regulations to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital realm. The importance of Internet governance lies in ensuring stability, security, openness, and protection of user rights.

Landmark decisions have shaped policies on net neutrality, data protection, copyright, and cybersecurity globally. In the Indian context, internet governance is influenced by the legal framework, initiatives like Digital India, and the role of TRAI.

However, challenges persist in government surveillance, content regulation, cybersecurity threats, and the digital divide. Resolving conflicts related to Internet governance requires balancing competing interests and fostering global cooperation.

Several countries have shown strength in digital rights, privacy protection, and infrastructure development. As technology advances and the Internet becomes an integral part of our lives, effective and inclusive internet governance becomes increasingly crucial. By addressing conflicts, embracing global cooperation, and adapting to emerging challenges, the global community can work towards a robust and equitable internet governance framework that fosters innovation, protects user rights, and ensures a secure digital future for all.

18.12 FURTHER READINGS

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18.13 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1. The emergence of the Internet, the formation of ICANN, the role of the United States, globalisation and internationalisation, the World Summit on the Information Society, the Montevideo Statement and the IANA transition.
2. Internet governance ensures a stable and secure internet, fosters an open and innovative global platform, protects user rights and privacy, promotes global collaboration, and addresses key challenges for a harmonious online ecosystem.
3. Internet Governance Forum (IGF) facilitates discussions, ICANN manages domain names, IETF develops internet standards, W3C ensures web compatibility, and RIRs allocate IP address space.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Net neutrality regulations, GDPR for data protection, Safe Harbor and Privacy Shield agreements for data transfer, domain name dispute resolution policies, copyright and intellectual property rights, and cybersecurity and anti-spam measures.
2. India has a legal framework for internet governance, the Digital India initiative promotes digital adoption, and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) plays a key role in regulating the telecom sector.

3. Challenges include government surveillance and privacy concerns, content regulation and freedom of expression, cybersecurity threats, the digital divide, and jurisdictional issues. Opportunities lie in promoting civic movements, global cooperation, and ranking countries based on Internet governance policies.



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