



# INTERNET GOVERNANCE

## GOALS AND PRIORITIES

- Prioritize openness, innovation, and inclusion
- Preserve global network security, interoperability, and stability
- Promote multistakeholder processes and increased global stakeholder participation in Internet governance discussions

*“We understand that unlike many models of government that are basically top-down, the Internet allows all stakeholders—the private sector, civil society, academics, engineers, and governments—to all have seats at the table... Because of the dynamic nature of this technology, new issues are constantly on the horizon — but the multi-stakeholder approach remains the fairest, and the best, most effective way to be able to resolve those challenges.”*

— Secretary Kerry, *An Open and Secure Internet: We Must Have Both*, Korea University, Seoul, Republic of Korea, May 18 2015.

The Internet has emerged organically—not planned in a conventional sense and not constructed pursuant to comprehensive legal and regulatory strictures. It is, in President Obama’s words, “one of the finest examples of a community self-organizing.”

## WHO GOVERNS THE INTERNET?

‘Internet governance’ is a broad term that applies to a diverse set of largely technical functions, all of which impact the character of the Internet. Notably, most of these voluntary technical standards and commercial agreements evolved organically through the actions of and collaboration among computer scientists and engineers, not through governmental or intergovernmental control. Organizations such as the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), and others have played a major role in designing and operating the Internet we know today. Because of their openness and inclusiveness, these organizations are most capable of addressing issues with the speed and flexibility required in this rapidly changing Internet environment.

The Internet has become an effective vehicle not only for economic growth but also for social change, which many non-democratic regimes view as an existential threat to their stability and control. Accordingly, for the past decade or so, a handful of states have been strongly pushing for expanded governmental and intergovernmental powers to regulate the Internet. Such an outcome would disenfranchise those most responsible for today’s dynamic Internet, further a regulatory environment that stifles innovation and freedom of expression, and undermine the Internet’s security and stability.



---

## WHAT IS THE MULTISTAKEHOLDER PROCESS?

At the heart of many Internet governance discussions is the issue of multistakeholder process and stakeholder inclusion. The debate revolves around the questions of who should make technical decisions about the management of the Internet and, increasingly, who should make Internet-related public policy. The U.S. position is that when decisions are made about the future of the Internet, all stakeholders—the private sector, civil society, academics, the technical community, and governments—should have a seat at the table. Additionally, the United States encourages states to develop multistakeholder processes for the development of national-level public policies related to the Internet—even if the final policy determination is made by the government.

## CYBER DIPLOMACY



The Internet Governance Forum (IGF), mandated by the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2005, is an annual, global, multistakeholder forum for dialogue on Internet policy issues, which provides a valuable venue for candid and timely discussion among stakeholders on an equal footing. Another effective multistakeholder governance venue is the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which is responsible for the technical management and coordination of the Internet's domain name system (DNS) and its unique identifiers. Noting that ICANN as an organization has matured and taken steps to improve its accountability and transparency, in March 2014, the U.S. Commerce Department's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) announced its intent to

transition key Internet domain name functions to the global multistakeholder community and asked ICANN to convene global stakeholders to develop a proposal to transition the current oversight role played by NTIA in the coordination of the Internet's DNS. The United States participates as a stakeholder and as an active member of the Government Advisory Committee (GAC), one of the stakeholder constituencies advising ICANN on its policies and processes.

While the current multistakeholder system of Internet governance has been successful, some states seek the creation of a new system, subject to intergovernmental control—one that excludes non-governmental stakeholders from the process. Intergovernmental controls would upend the currently successful model of multistakeholder governance, and inevitably lead to new restrictive rules and regulations, the most noxious of which would be censorship or content controls by repressive regimes.

The United States is currently engaged in multilateral fora to promote the multistakeholder model of Internet governance. Apart from the central question of who is able to participate in the various Internet governance processes, many substantive issues are discussed at the various Internet governance fora. These include: access and development, human rights, security, and combating cybercrime, among many others. The U.S. government prioritizes increasing connectivity, openness and innovation, and the security and stability of the Internet foremost; detailed policies and goals are described in the separate two-pagers for each topic.

Office of the Coordinator For Cyber Issues (S/CCI)  
United States Department of State

