

WORKING GROUP ON ALGORITHMIC GOVERNANCE

Global South and North Convergences and Divergences

CONTEXT

Algorithmic decision-making holds the potential to greatly benefit society, accomplishing complex tasks efficiently and inexpensively. Algorithms can be used to help make societies more just and equitable, enabling widespread access to vital services and new conveniences. At the same time, AI tools have been critiqued for their potential to reinforce existing social and economic structures and social biases – possibly exacerbating divisions within society and increasing power imbalances between governments, corporations, and publics.

While great power competition and security challenges surrounding automated decision-making systems in governance receive significant attention from policy makers, a regulatory rift is emerging between the Global South and North. The promise and pitfalls of algorithmic governance vary from one geographic or societal context to another. This wide array of challenges and possibilities necessitates informed dialogue on algorithmic governance in the context of the South-North divide, particularly in the context of examining potential routes toward a meaningful international digital rights framework.

FOCUS

The goal of this working group is to outline and discuss the most important areas of convergence and divergence between the communities of the Global South and North in their experience of and regulatory approaches toward algorithmic governance. Its intended audience is not limited to policymakers – South and North, and at the international level – but should also include other researchers, advocates, and the general public. This wide discussion will subsequently inform possible pathways toward a Digital Bill of Rights that accounts for these similarities and differences, enabling a truly global policy dialogue without rigid objectives and expectations.

QUESTIONS

- Across regional contexts, for which policy problems are AI tools most needed and in which areas of governance should their usage be avoided?
- What economic and social divides must be navigated as we formulate regulatory approaches on AI that account for the interests and histories of countries across the Global South?

- What topics peculiar to the relationships between South and North countries require specific attention in navigating the increased application of algorithmic systems and artificial intelligence platforms to economic and administrative problems?
- What are the most effective approaches to counter the legacies of colonialism and racism that may shape how algorithmic platforms are designed and used?
- How can we ensure that policy making discussions surrounding algorithmic governance do not unnecessarily stratify the world into “norms producers” and “norms consumers”?
- In what ways can civil society inform and advance these discussions? Recognizing power imbalances, what are the basic requirements for informed and constructive exchange between NGOs, advocacy organizations, academic research institutions on the one hand and corporations and governments on the other?

COMPOSITION

- This working group will be drawn from civil society organizations, academic institutions, public and private technology experts from across the Global South and the Global North.
- The staff and affiliates of the Initiate: Digital Rights in Society process will serve as secretariat and will nominate the initial working group membership, with the members enabled to undertake further recruitment in consultation with the secretariat.
- The working group will also include former and retired government officials from across the Global South or drawn from international agencies with specific expertise on the subject matter addressed.
- Representatives from tech companies and trade associations active at the regional level across the Global South will also be invited to participate to provide insights and expertise on a common agenda.
- Finally, several international organizations and agency networks focused on regional governance and international development issues will be invited to hold “active observer” status within the working group’s proceedings and/or communications – as the convened group determines appropriate.

OUTPUT

The output of the working group will be determined in consultation between the secretariat and the members of the group itself. While a traditional white paper with formal recommendations for policymakers is anticipated, innovative output that engages publics across the Global South

and North is also encouraged – support may be possible for social media outreach, podcasts, and video interviews and discussions. The format of the desired output should be determined by the working group no later than mid-September 2021.

TIMELINE

The working group will convene for its first meeting, either partially or in its entirety (depending on the membership nomination and recruitment process) by mid-July 2021. Subsequent meetings will occur on a monthly basis through December 2021 or into early 2022, as the working group itself determines necessary. This schedule will likely involve 4 to 5 virtual meetings over the second half of 2021, with an estimated time commitment of no more than 4-5 per month for each participant. The working group will be represented at the fourth annual Paris Peace Forum November 11-13, 2021, where it will share its initial findings in conversation with policymakers and civil society leaders from around the world.