The G7 and AI Governance: Towards a Deeper and Broader Agenda

by Francesca Maremonti

ABSTRACT

Few areas of development and innovation attract attention like artificial intelligence (AI), which looms large in the regulatory effort of multilateral fora and international organisations. The G7 is striving to be at the forefront of such efforts. Under the Italian presidency in 2024, the G7 has integrated two key challenges into its agenda: the fragmentation of the AI global policy landscape and the digital divide between high- and low-and middle-income countries, which is likely to feed into growing global inequalities. Under the Italian presidency the G7 has given an impulse to international cooperation for AI regulation. To consolidate its role in shaping AI governance, the Group will have to further develop these two fundamental lines of action.

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by Francesca Maremonti*

Overview

G7 countries hold a significant potential to carve out a prominent role in a sphere with wide-ranging economic and security ramifications: the digital domain and governance of artificial intelligence (AI). In taking over the presidency of G7 in January 2024, Italy identified the promotion of deeper cooperation in the AI realm as a top priority. Heading towards the end of the year – with the second Ministerial meeting on Science and Technology concluded in mid-October – some considerations can be drawn on the evolving role of the G7 in shaping AI governance.

Over the past decades, governments worldwide have begun to recognise AI as a driving force for competitiveness and groundbreaking innovation. Leading digital powers have engaged in a race to promote their respective AI strategies, rooted in different principles and diverging national interests. The United States, where most AI companies originate from, has pushed for a market-driven approach and voluntary commitments, seeing regulation as inhibiting innovation. By contrast, the European Union has promoted a human-centred and risk-based approach. Other digital powers like China and India have advanced alternative models, focused respectively on state-controlled innovation[1] and AI aimed at strengthening public digital infrastructure to achieve better connectivity and inclusion.[2] Those AI strategies have gained traction as models for newcomers. Digital powers – predominantly the United Stated and China – have also benefitted from the economic gains of AI. The latter's potential to enhance productivity and stimulate growth is staggering – it is projected to contribute about 15.7 trillion US dollars to global GDP by 2030 – but such gains risk remaining geographically concentrated.[3]

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[1] Jufang Wang et al., "Navigating Geopolitics in AI Governance", in *OXGS Research Reports*, April 2024, https://oxgs.org/?p=11407.

[2] NITI Aayog, *National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence*, June 2018, https://www.niti.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-03/National-Strategy-for-Artificial-Intelligence.pdf.

[3] PwC, *Sizing the Prize. What's the Real Value of AI for Your Business and How Can You Capitalise?*,

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This trend has resulted into two distinct governance challenges: a pronounced fragmentation of the AI policy landscape and an increased digital divide between digital leaders and low- and middle-income countries lagging behind. These challenges are likely to hinder a global approach towards AI regulation and feed into growing global inequality.

This paper evaluates the role of the G7 in tackling these two challenges lying at the heart of AI governance. Section 1 provides an overview and assessment of the main results achieved within the G7 to promote greater regulatory convergence within the G7 perimeter. It also illustrates the main challenges the Group faces in advancing AI regulation. Second 2 looks at how the G7 can contribute to bridging the digital divide, with a focus on cooperation with Africa.

1. The role of the G7: A deeper effort

The G7 is confronted with several obstacles to a functional global digital governance. The fragmented AI policy landscape have ramifications even at this level. Regulatory divergences among G7 states have complicated the development of the global approach for which the Group strives. In recent years, the G7 has doubled down on its effort to work towards greater internal convergence building on common values.[4]

1.1 The normative role of the G7: Progress on AI governance

Despite divergences across national jurisdictions, G7 countries align on shared principles such as transparency – an umbrella term referring to the ability to explain how AI systems make decisions, why they produce specific results, and which data is used.[5] The Artificial Intelligence Policy Observatory developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) maps AI policy initiatives, regulatory actions, and implementation of legislations delivered by over 70 countries. It shows that G7 countries are active in promoting this principle, with the United States and Japan being far better than the others in terms of ensuring transparency, followed by Germany, Canada and the United Kingdom.[6] This principle also features in the Italian AI strategy released during its G7 presidency in July 2024.[7]

September 2017, https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/artificial-intelligence/publications/artificial-intelligence-study.html.

[4] G7, *Hiroshima Leaders' Communiqué*, 20 May 2023, https://g7.utoronto.ca/summit/2023hiroshima/230520-communique.html. See also Douglas Lippoldt, "AI Innovation Concentration and the Governance Challenge", in *CIGI Papers*, No. 292 (April 2024), p. 8, https://www.cigionline.org/publications/ai-innovation-concentration-and-the-governance-challenge.

[5] OECD AI Policy Observatory website: *OECD AI Principles: Transparency and Explainability (Principle 1.3)*, https://oecd.ai/en/dashboards/ai-principles/P7.

[6] Douglas Lippoldt, "AI Innovation Concentration and the Governance Challenge", cit.

[7] Italian Government, *Italian Strategy for Artificial Intelligence 2024-2026*, July 2024, https://www.

At the G7 level, transparency was first introduced by on the Hiroshima Process International Guiding Principles for Advanced AI Systems launched under Japan's G7 presidency in October 2023. This document is the most significant normative milestone regarding the AI achieved under the G7 umbrella. It provides a "non-exhaustive" list of eleven high-level guiding principles[8] – built on the OECD AI Principles – with the goal of mitigating risks and identifying vulnerabilities of AI systems. The Hiroshima Guiding Principles are complemented by the International Code of Conduct for Organizations Developing Advanced AI Systems, a voluntary guidance for AI developers that aims to "promote safe, secure, and trustworthy AI worldwide".[9] The voluntary Code of Conduct is a temporary measure towards possibly more binding rules.

The normative principles set at the G7 level hold the potential to inform the AI regulatory process of G7 members at the national level, while also influencing like-minded countries' choices in this domain. For example, the 2023 US presidential AI executive order[10] and Japan's updated AI regulatory guidance have embraced principles included in the Hiroshima Process, such as safety and trustworthiness of AI.[11] Moreover, according to EU officials,[12] the drafting process of the EU AI Act drew from the Hiroshima AI Process (HAIP), signalling the normative potential of the G7 beyond its perimeter.[13]

Under the Italian presidency, the G7 has identified key policy areas to build greater convergence, including AI-enabled domains, such as digital public infrastructure (DPI) and digital government services.[14] Other initiatives adopted in 2024 include the G7 Toolkit for Artificial Intelligence in the Public Sector which is designed to help governments deliver digital services to their respective "economies and societies, while protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms".[15] The toolkit

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agid.gov.it/en/node/225.

[8] G7, *Hiroshima Process International Guiding Principles for Organizations Developing Advanced AI Systems*, 30 October 2023, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/node/12131.

[9] G7, *Hiroshima Process International Code of Conduct for Organizations Developing Advanced AI Systems*, 30 October 2023, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/node/12130.

[10] White House, *Fact Sheet: President Biden Issues Executive Order on Safe, Secure, and Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence*, 30 October 2023, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/10/30/fact-sheet-president-biden-issues-executive-order-on-safe-secure-and-trustworthy-artificial-intelligence.

[11] Gregory C. Allen and Georgia Adamson, "Advancing the Hiroshima AI Process Code of Conduct under the 2024 Italian G7 Presidency: Timeline and Recommendations", in *CSIS Reports*, March 2024, p. 1-2, https://www.csis.org/node/109940.

[12] In conversation with CSIS, see ibid. For more, see Jufang Wang et al., "Navigating Geopolitics in AI Governance", cit.

[13] Gregory C. Allen and Georgia Adamson, "Advancing the Hiroshima AI Process Code of Conduct", cit.

[14] G7, *Ministerial Declaration, G7 Industry, Technology and Digital Ministerial Meeting*, Verona and Trento, 14-15 March 2024, https://www.g7italy.it/wp-content/uploads/G7-Industry-Tech-and-Digital-Ministerial-Declaration-Annexes-1.pdf.

[15] G7, *Apulia G7 Leaders' Communiqué*, 14 June 2024, p. 21, https://www.g7italy.it/wp-content/uploads/Apulia-G7-Leaders-Communique.pdf.

has been developed by OECD in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), drawing from inputs provided by G7 countries. The toolkit is meant to help assess the different approaches to AI adoption in the public sector and identify best practices to develop a coordinated approach for a safe, secure and trustworthy AI adoption in the public sector.[16]

1.2 Towards the implementation of AI principles

The normative milestones achieved under the Japanese G7 presidency in 2023 marked an advancement on global AI governance, introducing high-level principles for a shared regulatory framework. However, the G7 faces the risk of stagnation of the AI regulation process, as well as the risk of lacking added value to AI governance, if it fails to translate AI principles into tangible measures. Advancing the HAIP and ensuring enforceability of shared AI values are of particular importance in this regard. The G7 needs to promote, firstly, a multistakeholder approach and, secondly, greater cooperation with international organisations in developing monitoring mechanisms for AI to make progress on both fronts.

The AI revolution is driven by non-state actors, including the private sector, civil society, the academic and technology community.[17] From 2016 onwards, many private companies have issued statements of commitment to principles for AI out of concern over the social and moral implications of AI use. According to such principles AI systems should be non-biased, transparent, safe and privacy-proof.[18] But these initiatives have been often frustrated by the lack of overarching guidelines, which has resulted in fragmented responses from the private sector. G7 leaders have taken on this challenge and committed to gathering inputs from AI developers through requests for comments, working groups and formal meetings of relevant stakeholders.[19] However, the road towards a multistakeholder approach for AI governance is steep. Designing well-crafted actionable tools for the Code of Conduct that can ensure the needed transparency is a big challenge. The participation of AI stakeholders in G7 working groups as observers could be a meaningful way to pursue such a goal and help avoid the fragmentation of AI efforts, while promoting a consensus-driven global framework for trustworthy AI.[20]

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[16] OECD and UNESCO, *G7 Toolkit for Artificial Intelligence in the Public Sector*, 15 October 2024, https://doi.org/10.1787/421c1244-en.

[17] Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer et al., "Pivotal Powers 2024. Innovative Engagement Strategies for Global Governance, Security, and Artificial Intelligence", in *GMF Reports*, November 2024, https://www.gmfus.org/node/23713.

[18] Paul B. de Laat, "Companies Committed to Responsible AI: From Principles towards Implementation and Regulation?", in *Philosophy and Technology*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (December 2021), p. 1135-1193, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-021-00474-3.

[19] Gregory C. Allen and Georgia Adamson, "Advancing the Hiroshima AI Process Code of Conduct", cit.

[20] EY Global, *G7 AI Principles and Code of Conduct*, 1 December 2023, https://www.ey.com/en_gl/insights/ai/g7-ai-principles-and-code-of-conduct.

Promoting the design of monitoring mechanisms to evaluate businesses' adherence to the Code of Conduct has been one of the priorities of the G7 under the Italian presidency. During the AI Seoul Summit, held in late May 2024, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni underlined the paramount importance of the public-private partnership.[21] At the Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting of September 2024, the G7 committed to develop and "Action Plan for a human-centered adoption of safe, secure and trustworthy AI in the World of Work", in close cooperation with the private sector, workers' organisations, civil society, academia and other stakeholders.[22] During the June summit in Apulia, G7 leaders called for the development of a pilot project to design a reporting framework and establish a robust monitoring mechanism for the Code of Conduct.[23] The pilot project was launched in July 2024 by the OECD, marking a milestone towards enforceability of AI principles. The reporting framework aims to gather information about how AI developers align with the Actions of the Code of Conduct.[24]

The normative role of the G7 can be hamstrung by the lack of permanent bodies to deliver policies across presidencies. Increased cooperation with international organisations such as UNESCO and OECD can facilitate the implementation of principles and the design of monitoring mechanisms and ensure a greater deal of continuity across the changing G7 presidencies. With its Global Digital Compact,[25] the United Nations has committed to the establishing an International Scientific Panel on AI to conduct independent multi-disciplinary scientific risk and evidence-based opportunity assessments.[26] G7 countries can also reinvigorate their cooperation ties with other countries under the OECD umbrella. The advancements achieved under the G7 can be channelled into the work of OECD, and amplified through broader cooperation with key partners and institutions. This year's Japan Chairmanship of OECD's Ministerial Council has been instrumental in ensuring continuity and synergy between the HAIP and the work of the OECD itself. This highlights the functional porosity across multilateral platforms. Overall, the G7 has made progress in deepening internal convergence on AI regulation and has taken key steps towards future advancements. Its role in the AI governance landscape has consolidated. Nonetheless, the challenges that lay ahead are numerous.

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[21] Italian Government, *President Meloni's Video Message to the AI Seoul Summit*, 21 May 2024, https://www.governo.it/en/node/25828.

[22] G7, *Towards an Inclusive Human-Centered Approach for New Challenges in the World of Work, Ministerial Declaration, G7 Labour and Employment Ministers' Meeting in Cagliari*, 12-13 September 2024, https://g7.utoronto.ca/employment/2024-declaration.html.

[23] G7, *Apulia G7 Leaders' Communiqué*, cit.

[24] OECD, *OECD Launches Pilot to Monitor Application of G7 Code of Conduct on Advanced AI Development*, 22 July 2024, https://www.oecd.org/en/about/news/press-releases/2024/07/oecd-launches-pilot-to-monitor-application-of-g7-code-of-conduct-on-advanced-ai-development.html.

[25] "Objective 5. Enhance international governance of artificial intelligence for the benefit of humanity". See United Nations, *Global Digital Compact*, Annex 1 to *The Pact for the Future* (A/RES/79/1), 22 September 2024, https://www.undocs.org/en/A/RES/79/1. See also the website of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology: *Global Digital Compact*, https://www.un.org/techenvoy/global-digital-compact.

[26] United Nations, *Global Digital Compact*, cit.

2.The role of the G7: A broader effort

The transformative potential of AI offers tremendous opportunities to drive the so-called 4th industrial revolution in low- and middle-income countries. However, most countries worldwide are struggling with a digital divide that may feed into global inequality. According to an estimate by Pwc, North America and China will see the largest GDP gains from the economic growth induced by AI.[27] Governments across the world and international organisations have become increasingly aware of the implications of the digital divide for global inequalities. Under the Italian presidency, the G7 has integrated the challenge of bridging the digital divide into its agenda.

2.1 The challenge of digital divide

The successful adoption of AI requires AI readiness, which includes inter alia sound digital infrastructures, regulatory frameworks for data and AI governance, and retention of talents. AI is widening the pre-existing digital divide to the extent that billions are excluded from the benefits of technological progress.[28] The potential for AI innovation in Africa is staggering: it is estimated that AI could add 2.9 trillion US dollars in value to the continent's economy by 2030.[29] However, 63 per cent of people in Africa lack internet access to this day.[30]

AI may contribute to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular promoting education, healthcare, economic development and labour productivity.[31] In 2024, landmark documents promoting inclusivity in AI governance and bridging the digital divide have been adopted. In March 2024, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the promotion of "safe, secure and trustworthy" AI systems to support sustainable development for all.[32] The Pact for the Future adopted in September 2024 at the UN's Summit of the Future held in New York includes a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration on Future

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[27] Danni Yu, Hannah Rosenfeld and Abhishek Gupta, "The 'AI Divide' between the Global North and the Global South", in *World Economic Forum Annual Meeting*, 16 January 2023, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/01/davos23-ai-divide-global-north-global-south.

[28] Chris McClean and Almin Surani, "AI Is Deepening the Digital Divide", in *Information Week*, 30 November 2023, https://www.informationweek.com/machine-learning-ai/ai-is-deepening-the-digital-divide.

[29] Vincenzo Del Monaco, Eva Spina and Keyzom Ngodup Massally, "Italy and UNDP: How the New AI Hub for Sustainable Development Will Strengthen the Foundations for Growth in Africa", in *New Atlanticist*, 4 October 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/?p=797111.

[30] Jochai Ben-Avie, "Don't Let AI Become the Newest Digital Divide", in *CFR Blog*, 18 January 2024, https://www.cfr.org/node/250570.

[31] UN News, *General Assembly Adopts Landmark Resolution on Artificial Intelligence*, 21 March 2024, https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147831.

[32] UN General Assembly, *Seizing the Opportunities of Safe, Secure and Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence Systems for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/78/265), 21 March 2024, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4043244.

Generations.[33] The Global Digital Compact, in particular, provides a comprehensive framework for global governance of digital technology and AI, charting a roadmap for global digital cooperation to harness AI potential and bridge digital divides.[34] It introduces new commitments, such as the promotion of "affordable connectivity" – more affordable digital technologies and services – and the integration of a gender perspective into digital connectivity strategies. The G20 agenda largely aligns with the UN commitment to unlock AI potential to promote SDGs, while aiming at spearheading global conversations on AI governance under the motto "Science for Global Transformation".[35]

2.2 A new role for the G7

As discussed above, the G7's contribution to a global response to AI has been mostly normative. In addition, focusing on convergence among member states, the G7 risks overlooking the global dimension of the AI challenge. China has painted the G7 as an "elite club", pointing to its little international credibility in the eyes of developing countries.[36] In 2024, the Italian presidency of the G7 has signalled greater awareness about the need to enhance cooperation on AI beyond the G7 framework. This has marked the potential beginning of a new phase in which the G7 can play an active role in bridging the global digital divide and promoting greater inclusivity in the AI landscape. This new commitment has led to the launch of the AI Hub for Sustainable Development, a joint initiative of the Italian Presidency and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Involving representatives of the African private sector, the AI Hub aims to create new market opportunities in Africa, strengthen the AI ecosystem and empower innovators in Africa.[37]

Expected to become operational in 2025,[38] the AI Hub is meant to serve as a catalyst for cooperation between institutional actors and the African private sector. It aims at forging partnerships and attracting investments to develop a digital ecosystem (data pipelines, green computational power, talent development) which could impact key development areas such as agriculture, health, energy, education and infrastructure. Under the Italian presidency, the G7and the UNDP launched

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[33] United Nations, *Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations. Summit of the Future Outcome Documents*, September 2024, https://www.un.org/en/node/222117.

[34] Website of the UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology: *Global Digital Compact*, https://www.un.org/techenvoy/global-digital-compact.

[35] S20 Brasil 2024 Task Force 1, *Artificial Intelligence: Ethics, Social Impact, Regulation, and Knowledge Sharing*, August 2024, https://s20brasil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/TF-Artificial-Intelligence-Final-S20-Brasil-2024.pdf.

[36] Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Remarks on G7 Hiroshima Summit's Hyping up of China-related Issues*, 20 May 2023, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/fyrbt/fyrbt/202405/t20240530_11349774.html.

[37] Italian G7 Presidency and UNDP, *AI Hub for Sustainable Development. Strengthening Local AI Ecosystems through Collective Action*, New York, UNDP, July 2024, p. 5, https://www.undp.org/node/474651.

[38] The focus of the AI Hub will initially be on nine African countries: Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, the Republic of Congo and Tunisia.

additional pilot projects to integrate the inputs provided by the African Union into the design of the AI Hub: the AI Hub for Sustainable Development Co-Design: Startup Acceleration Pilot[39] and the Local Language Partnerships Accelerator Pilot programmes.[40] The first is a programme to promote innovation and partnerships in data, compute, and talent – three critical pillars underpinning local AI ecosystems in Africa – while the second seeks to develop new AI language models in key sectors such as energy, agriculture, health, water, education and training, and infrastructure. The development of the AI Hub has been carried out through a multistakeholder approach and informed by consultations among G7 members and non-state actors from Africa. It has integrated the African Union's "Continental AI Strategy" into a broader international effort to promote digital transformation through AI. The AI Hub is at an early stage, but by working on its implementation the G7 could carve out a role in promoting the global governance of AI beyond its perimeter.

Conclusions

Along with big opportunities for groundbreaking innovation and economic growth, AI also presents significant challenges, chief among them the need for a global approach to AI governance and for effective measures to bridge the digital divide which risks exacerbating global inequalities. Past presidencies of the G7 prioritised the effort to address the first challenge, in an effort to foster the G7's normative role in the AI landscape. To cement internal convergence on AI governance, the G7 needs to make further progress towards the monitoring and enforceability of the AI principles included in the HAIP. To avoid stagnation and fragmentation of policy responses, the G7 should work in cooperation with international organisations such as UNESCO and the OECD. While the G7 has a prominent role to play in establishing principles to shape AI global governance, practical advancement can be effectively made only in partnership with other bodies and actors. Under the Italian presidency in 2024, the G7 has integrated the challenge of bridging the digital divide into its agenda. Its role has thus expanded to promoting AI governance beyond its perimeter. Looking ahead, the G7 should complement its established normative role with the newly found role as a promoter of wider initiatives and agreements that can increase the inclusiveness of AI governance. G7 leaders will have to intensify their efforts along these two lines of action as they are both key to advancing AI governance.

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[39] Italian G7 Presidency and UNDP, *AI Hub for Sustainable Development Co-Design. Startup Acceleration Pilot*, 2024, https://www.undp.org/node/474586.

[40] Italian G7 Presidency and UNDP, *AI Hub for Sustainable Development Co-Design. Local Language Partnerships Accelerator Pilot for Industrial Growth in Africa*, 2024, https://www.undp.org/node/474586.

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