

Artificial Intelligence and India's Emerging Role in Global Digital Governance

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the most transformative technologies of the twenty-first century, reshaping economies, governance structures, and international relations. AI is becoming central to global competition and cooperation. Countries are trying to influence the rules that govern their development and use. These rules are still evolving. Many governments want a strong role in shaping them. India is emerging as an essential actor in this process. The country has a large digital population. Its technology sector is growing rapidly. India's diplomatic engagement is also expanding. Because of these factors, India is positioning itself as a key player in global digital governance. The country's initiatives, such as the IndiaAI Mission, digital public infrastructure, and participation in multilateral forums, reflect an ambition to shape inclusive and ethical AI governance. The India AI Impact Summit 2026 in New Delhi marked a significant milestone in this effort, bringing together governments, industry leaders, researchers, and international organisations to discuss responsible AI development and cooperation. More than eighty countries supported a declaration advocating equitable access, transparency, and responsible deployment of AI technologies. Within this context, the present study explores India's evolving role in global digital governance through its AI policies, diplomatic engagement, technological capabilities, and international collaborations. The research aims to analyse how India is positioning itself within the global AI ecosystem by examining its domestic policy initiatives and global partnerships. It also evaluates the importance of India's recent AI summit and its contribution to ongoing global discussions on AI governance. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify the opportunities and constraints shaping India's aspirations to become a leading voice in global digital governance. The analysis proceeds from the hypothesis that India is increasingly functioning as an intermediary power in AI governance. It has the potential to bridge the divide between technologically advanced countries and developing nations. India does this by advocating inclusive, ethical, and accessible frameworks for AI.

KEYWORDS: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Global Digital Governance, IndiaAI Mission, Technology Diplomacy, Global South, Digital Sovereignty, AI Ethics, International Relations

INTRODUCTION

AI has become a central component of global technological transformation in the twenty-first century. From healthcare and finance to governance and defence, AI technologies are increasingly integrated into almost every sector of society. Governments across the world recognise AI as a strategic asset that can influence economic growth, technological leadership, and geopolitical power.

In recent years, discussions about global digital governance have intensified due to concerns about the ethical use of AI, data protection, algorithmic bias, cybersecurity threats, and economic inequality.

International organisations, governments, and technology companies are actively shaping policies and frameworks that will determine how AI technologies are developed and deployed worldwide.

India is currently one of the largest digital societies in the world, with more than 700 million internet users and rapidly expanding digital services. The country has built large-scale digital platforms such as Aadhaar, Unified Payments Interface (UPI), and DigiLocker, which together form one of the most extensive digital public infrastructures globally. These developments provide India with unique advantages in data availability, digital innovation, and AI experimentation. This vast digital base provides an ideal environment for the development, testing, and large-scale adoption of AI technologies. Additionally, India possesses an extensive pool of skilled professionals and a rapidly growing startup ecosystem. The country currently has over 600,000 AI professionals, and this number is expected to grow significantly in the coming years¹.

India's ambitions extend beyond technological advancement. The country also seeks to shape the global rules and norms that govern the development and use of AI technologies. Through initiatives such as the IndiaAI Mission, digital public infrastructure, and international diplomatic engagement, India is positioning itself as a voice for inclusive and democratic AI governance.

AI and Global Governance

AI is rapidly transforming the nature of global governance by influencing how states manage economies, security, public administration, and international cooperation. Unlike earlier technological innovations, AI systems can analyse massive datasets, detect patterns, automate decision-making, and generate predictive insights. These capabilities have significant implications for policy formulation, economic competitiveness, and geopolitical power. Governments across the world increasingly view AI not only as a technological tool but also as a strategic resource capable of shaping national power and global influence. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), AI could contribute up to USD 15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030², mainly through productivity gains, automation, and the creation of new digital services. This projection illustrates why states are competing to develop AI capabilities and influence global rules governing its use.

The expansion of AI technologies has also altered traditional governance mechanisms. In areas such as healthcare, financial systems, climate modelling, and urban planning, AI-driven analytics help governments make faster, more informed decisions. For example, predictive AI models are being used to forecast disease outbreaks, optimise traffic systems, and improve disaster management strategies. International organisations, including the United Nations and the World Economic Forum, have emphasised that AI could significantly enhance global cooperation in addressing complex transnational challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and food security. At the same time, the increasing reliance on algorithmic systems raises concerns about privacy, data protection, bias, and accountability, underscoring the need for global governance frameworks.

The competition for AI leadership has intensified among major powers, particularly the United States and China. Both countries have invested billions of dollars in AI research, computing infrastructure, and talent development. The United States remains a global leader in AI innovation due to its strong technology companies, research universities, and venture capital ecosystem. According to data from the Stanford Institute for Human-Centred AI AI Index Report, in 2024, U.S. private AI investment grew to \$109.1 billion—nearly 12 times China's \$9.3 billion and 24 times the U.K.'s \$4.5 billion³. China's government has also identified AI as a strategic priority in its national development plans and aims to become a world

leader in AI technology by 2030. Major Chinese firms such as Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent are heavily investing in machine learning, autonomous systems, and data platforms to strengthen the country's digital economy.

The strategic competition between these major powers extends beyond technological development to the shaping of global governance norms. AI standards, ethical guidelines, and regulatory frameworks are increasingly becoming arenas of geopolitical contestation. The United States has broadly adopted a market-driven approach that encourages innovation and private sector leadership, while China emphasises strong state coordination and large-scale data utilisation. Meanwhile, the European Union has adopted a regulatory approach focused on ethics, transparency, and human rights. The EU's proposed AI Act is one of the world's most comprehensive attempts to regulate AI. It categorises AI systems by risk level and imposes strict obligations on developers of high-risk technologies⁴. These different approaches demonstrate that global AI governance is shaped not only by technological capability but also by political values and institutional structures.

International organisations and multilateral forums have begun to address the governance challenges posed by AI. In 2019, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development adopted the OECD Principles on AI⁵. These principles emphasise transparency, accountability, fairness, and human-centred values. More than forty countries have endorsed these principles, making them one of the earliest global frameworks for responsible AI governance. In a similar effort to establish international standards, UNESCO adopted the "Recommendation on the Ethics of AI" in 2021, the first global framework on AI ethics applicable to all 194 member states of the organisation.⁶ This framework highlights the importance of protecting human rights, ensuring algorithmic transparency, and preventing discrimination in AI systems. Such initiatives demonstrate that AI governance is gradually moving from national experimentation toward broader international coordination.

Despite these developments, global governance of AI remains fragmented. Countries differ significantly in their regulatory priorities, technological capabilities, and economic interests. Some governments prioritise innovation and economic growth, while others focus on privacy protection, digital sovereignty, or national security. As a result, there is no single global framework governing AI development and deployment. According to a World Bank report, more than 60 countries had released national AI strategies by 2024⁷, yet these strategies vary widely in terms of regulatory frameworks, funding commitments, and ethical guidelines. The absence of universally accepted standards creates risks, including regulatory conflicts, unequal access to technology, and the concentration of digital power in a few technologically advanced countries.

Another major issue in global AI governance is the growing digital divide between developed and developing countries. Advanced economies possess the infrastructure, skilled workforce, and research institutions necessary to lead in AI innovation, whereas many developing nations struggle with limited digital capacity. According to the International Telecommunication Union, nearly 2.6 billion people worldwide still lack reliable internet access, which restricts their ability to participate in the digital economy⁸. Without inclusive governance frameworks, AI technologies could deepen existing inequalities in global development. This concern has encouraged international discussions about technology sharing, digital capacity building, and equitable access to data and computing resources.

In this context, middle powers and emerging economies are increasingly attempting to shape global debates on digital governance. Countries such as India, Brazil, and South Africa argue that global AI governance should reflect the interests of the Global South rather than being dominated solely by

technologically advanced nations. These states emphasise inclusive digital development, open innovation ecosystems, and equitable access to technology. India, in particular, has sought to promote the idea of “AI for All,” highlighting AI’s potential to address developmental challenges across sectors such as agriculture, healthcare, education, and disaster management.

India’s increasing engagement in international forums illustrates its growing ambition to shape global digital governance. The country has actively participated in discussions within the G20, the Global Partnership on AI (GPAI), and other multilateral platforms addressing the ethical and regulatory dimensions of AI. Through these engagements, India advocates frameworks that balance innovation with social responsibility. India’s domestic initiatives, including the national AI strategy and digital public infrastructure projects such as Aadhaar and digital payment platforms, are often presented as models for inclusive technological development in developing societies.

The growing importance of AI governance was also evident in the India AI Impact Summit 2026, held in New Delhi. The summit brought together policymakers, technology companies, researchers, and international organisations to discuss the future of AI and digital cooperation. More than eighty countries reportedly supported discussions on equitable access, transparency, and responsible use of AI technologies. Such initiatives demonstrate India’s attempt to position itself as a bridge between developed and developing countries in shaping global digital norms.

Overall, AI is emerging as a key factor in transforming global governance. The technology influences economic competitiveness, geopolitical power, and the regulation of digital societies. At the same time, major powers continue to dominate technological participation in the creation of governance frameworks. India’s growing involvement in these debates indicates that it seeks not only to develop domestic AI capabilities but also to contribute to the evolving architecture of global digital governance.

India in Global AI Governance

India’s evolving role in global digital governance, particularly in AI, is becoming increasingly significant. This development represents a key dimension of its broader technology and foreign policy agenda. At the heart of this trajectory are India’s deliberate domestic AI policy frameworks, strategic diplomatic engagements, growing technological capabilities, and expanding international collaborations. Each of these elements contributes to New Delhi’s efforts to shape global norms and practices around AI. These efforts aim to reflect both national interests and the broader priorities of the Global South.

At the domestic policy level, India’s IndiaAI Mission, approved by the Union Cabinet in March 2024 with an outlay of around USD 1.25 billion (approximately ₹10,372 crore), provides the structural foundation for India’s AI ecosystem. This mission is structured around pillars such as compute capacity, foundational AI models, datasets, application development, startup financing, future skills, and safe & trusted AI. For instance, the IndiaAI Compute Portal now provides shared access to approximately 38,000 GPUs and 1,050 TPUs at subsidised rates for startups, researchers, and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). This initiative helps to overcome a key bottleneck in advanced AI research and deployment. Efforts are also underway to develop sovereign model capabilities and build India-focused multilingual AI tools, such as language models and tools for regional languages⁹.

These domestic policy strides serve dual purposes. They foster an inclusive AI ecosystem across India’s socio-economic landscape and create a credible domestic foundation from which India can participate meaningfully in global digital governance. In practical terms, initiatives like the IndiaAI Mission’s dataset repository and IndiaAIKosh, which host thousands of datasets and support models across sectors,

demonstrate India's strategic focus on AI development. These initiatives signal India's intent to reduce global AI resource asymmetries by making data and computing resources more accessible both within and beyond its borders.

Diplomatic engagement and international positioning have become central to India's AI governance strategy. India has positioned itself as a proactive member and, at times, chair of multilateral platforms such as the Global Partnership on AI (GPAI). As the lead chair of GPAI in 2024, India hosted the Global IndiaAI Summit in July 2024 in New Delhi.

The summit brought together experts from governments, industry, academia, and civil society to discuss safe, trustworthy, and human-centric AI development across compute infrastructure, datasets, skills, and startup financing. The summit drew participants from dozens of countries. It served as a platform for advancing cooperative AI norms. These norms were informed by diverse regional perspectives, particularly those of the Global South.¹⁰

Diplomatically, India emphasises pluralistic, ethical, and inclusive AI governance, a vision prominently showcased at the India AI Impact Summit 2026 in New Delhi. The summit was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and attended by global leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron and United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres. India presented AI as a tool for low-cost, scalable solutions to benefit developing nations. Leaders from over 80 countries signed the "Delhi Declaration," advocating democratic, socially beneficial, and human-centric AI¹¹. At the same time, major global firms such as Microsoft, Google, and Amazon committed to significant investments in AI and cloud in India¹². Microsoft announced plans to invest up to \$50 billion by 2030 to support AI and digital ecosystem growth across the Global South, including India. Google and Amazon expanded local data centre capacity and collaborative startup funding. In total, global AI and cloud investment pledges in India exceed \$67 billion, with government projections aiming for over \$200 billion in data centre and allied technology investments by 2028¹³. These political endorsements and investment commitments highlight India's growing appeal as a strategic AI partner and underline its emergence as an influential voice in global AI governance and development.

Technological capabilities are another pillar of India's emerging role in global digital governance. Beyond infrastructure investments and compute capacity, India is fostering AI innovation through public-private partnerships and startup ecosystems, as evidenced by collaborations between global investors like Google and Accel to back Indian AI startups with multi-million-dollar funding packages, and initiatives such as the '100 Startups 100 Days' acceleration program to nurture deep-tech ventures¹⁴. These collaborations build India's domestic technological capabilities. They also integrate Indian AI innovation into global markets and research networks. This, in turn, strengthens the country's voice in international discussions on technology standards, ethics, and governance.

Furthermore, International collaborations in research, investment, and multilateral standard-setting demonstrate India's evolving role as a bridge between technological leaders and emerging economies.

On the research and academic front, Indian contributions to AI publications have grown significantly over the past decade. India is increasingly participating in large-scale model development and international AI forums. Institutions like the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Vietnam National University. They collaborate on AI applications in healthcare, smart cities, and agriculture. This partnership facilitates joint research and technology exchange between Asia's emerging economies.¹⁵ They collaborate on AI applications in healthcare, smart cities, and agriculture. This partnership facilitates research and technology exchange between Asia's emerging economies.¹⁶

These collaborations help ensure that AI governance principles include norms relevant to diverse cultural, economic, and developmental contexts, amplifying the perspectives of countries that have historically been underrepresented in global digital governance platforms.

Hence, India's current trajectory in AI underscores a multi-layered strategy that blends domestic capability-building with global engagement. By investing in inclusive infrastructure, orchestrating international dialogues on ethical AI, and aligning with global partners on technology collaboration, India is asserting itself as an architect of equitable and responsible AI governance. This evolving role reflects not only India's aspirations to lead in technology but also its ambition to bridge the divide between advanced and developing AI ecosystems, shaping global digital governance that prioritises accessibility, fairness, and shared progress.

The Summit and India's AI Diplomacy

India's recent AI Impact Summit 2026 was a landmark event. It significantly reinforced the country's role in the global AI ecosystem. The summit also highlighted India's contributions to shaping international AI governance. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, it provided a platform for dialogue. Through this, India positioned itself as a key facilitator of conversations on ethical, inclusive, and human-centred AI development.

A central theme of the summit was India's advocacy for a "third way" approach to AI governance. This approach promotes global cooperation while balancing innovation with strong ethical safeguards. It deliberately avoids complete alignment with either U.S.- or China-centric AI models. Instead, it offers an alternative framework that emphasises equitable access, societal benefits, and respect for national sovereignty.¹⁷ By presenting this model globally, India highlighted the importance of including the perspectives and developmental priorities of the Global South in AI governance. This approach ensures that AI policies are not dominated solely by technologically advanced nations.

The India AI Impact Summit 2026 also facilitated several strategic international partnerships and large-scale investment announcements, underscoring India's growing role in the global AI value chain. At the event, several prominent collaborations were unveiled, including a strategic partnership between OpenAI and the Tata Group, in which OpenAI will help build a 100 MW AI-ready data centre infrastructure in India, with potential expansion to 1 GW of capacity for advanced AI workloads, a development aimed at positioning India as a global AI hub¹⁸. Another major initiative announced was a partnership in Andhra Pradesh among the state government, IBM, BharatGen, and NxtGen to develop a sovereign "Swadeshi AI stack" that integrates Indian-language AI models with cloud and GPU infrastructure, enhancing both governance and localised AI deployment¹⁹.

In addition to specific project partnerships, major global and Indian industrial groups pledged enormous investments during the summit. Reliance Industries and its telecom arm Jio committed roughly USD 109.8 billion over the next seven years to AI and data infrastructure, while the Adani Group announced a USD 100 billion plan to build renewable-powered AI data centres by 2035, potentially catalysing another USD 150 billion across related sectors such as server manufacturing and sovereign cloud platforms. Microsoft reaffirmed its intent to invest USD 50 billion in the Global South by 2030, building on existing AI commitments in India, and data centre leader Yotta pledged over USD 2 billion for a central AI computing hub powered by Nvidia's latest chips²⁰. These commitments signal a rapid scaling of AI infrastructure and long-term capital flows into the Indian ecosystem.

By convening such a global dialogue with heads of state, international tech CEOs, and policymakers, India

not only showcased its technological and policy readiness but also actively contributed to shaping international norms, standards, and ethical frameworks that govern AI development and deployment. Participation from more than 30 countries and leaders from both advanced economies and the Global South reaffirmed India's role as a bridge between diverse geopolitical and development perspectives in AI policymaking, amplifying the voices of emerging economies in ongoing global AI governance debates.

Navigating Opportunities and Challenges

India's aspirations to become a leading voice in global digital governance are shaped by a complex mix of significant opportunities and persistent constraints. These factors influence both how India is perceived internationally and its ability to lead effectively. On the opportunity side, India's Digital India transformation has created a robust digital public infrastructure (DPI). This infrastructure serves as a global example of scalable, inclusive digital ecosystems. Platforms such as Unified Payments Interface (UPI) processed over 120 billion transactions in 2023–24, worth more than ₹200 trillion (approx. USD 2.4 trillion)²¹. This highlights India's capacity for building financial and identity systems that are cost-efficient and widely replicable in other developing countries. Such models are actively studied and emulated in regions across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This gives India credibility in global forums discussing digital governance frameworks.

India's leadership role has also been visible in international policy spaces. For example, at the International Telecommunication Union's Global Symposium for Regulators (GSR) 2025, India positioned itself not merely as a regulator but as a "bridge builder" in the discourse on digital regulation. It advocated frameworks that enable innovation while safeguarding consumer rights and security. Hosting high-level global events such as the India AI Impact Summit, the first major AI summit in the Global South, drawing heads of state and global tech CEOs, further demonstrates this ambition. These platforms allow India to steer conversations on ethical AI, inclusive digital development, and privacy standards. Collectively, these efforts reinforce India's claim to thought leadership in digital governance.

However, these opportunities are counterbalanced by several constraints that complicate India's path to global digital leadership. One key challenge is digital sovereignty and dependence on foreign technology. This dependence exposes India to geopolitical pressures and limits its influence over global digital norms, which are dominated by a handful of tech superpowers. Analysts note that the US's global digital dominance, which controls infrastructure, standards, and financial networks, creates asymmetries that India and other emerging economies must navigate carefully²². Relatedly, while India's domestic market includes nearly 1.2 billion digital identity holders, its hardware production capacity and localised innovation in frontier technologies, such as large-scale AI models, lag behind leading nations. These factors pose significant constraints on India's technological autonomy²³.

Furthermore, regulatory challenges and skill gaps, particularly in cutting-edge areas such as AI governance, require ongoing policy evolution. India also needs significant investments in education and cybersecurity frameworks to contribute effectively to global standards.

The recent strengthening of data protection regulations, aimed at aligning more closely with international norms like the EU's GDPR²⁴, underscores India's efforts to balance innovation with privacy protection. This balance is essential to maintaining credibility in global digital governance.

India's journey toward becoming a prominent voice in global digital governance is supported by the sheer scale of its digital infrastructure. Policy innovations with broad applicability and proactive engagement in international dialogues also bolster its position. At the same time, India must contend with strategic

constraints, such as technological dependencies and challenges in policy harmonisation. The country also needs greater investment in future-ready capabilities if it is to realise its aspirations on the world stage fully.

India's intermediary role in Ethical and Inclusive AI Governance

India is increasingly functioning as an intermediary power in global AI governance. It has the potential to bridge the divide between technologically advanced countries and developing nations. This role is reflected in India's efforts to promote inclusive, ethical, and accessible frameworks for AI.

This proposition is grounded in India's unique combination of digital capabilities, growing technological expertise, and strategic diplomatic positioning. Unlike leading AI powers such as the United States, China, and the European Union, India does not dominate global AI discourse. These countries possess well-established technological, financial, and policy resources. India instead occupies a middle ground in the international AI landscape. It is neither a fully developed technological superpower nor a marginal actor. However, it can influence global norms. This is possible through its inclusive developmental perspective and extensive international networks.

India's expanding digital and AI ecosystem forms a strong basis for this intermediary role, primarily through initiatives such as the IndiaAI Mission. The programme also includes the creation of IndiaAIKosh, a national AI repository designed to support research and innovation. It contains approximately 7,500+ datasets and 273 AI models²⁵. These resources span more than twenty sectors of the economy, enabling more exhaustive experimentation and development. Together, these initiatives aim to strengthen India's AI infrastructure and encourage the growth of indigenous AI solutions.

India's broader digital ecosystem also supports its AI ambitions. India has rapidly expanded its AI adoption and digital capacity in recent years. As of 2025, the country has an estimated 6 million²⁶ professionals working in tech and AI-related roles. India's AI adoption score on the NASSCOM AI Adoption Index stands at 2.45 on a four-point scale. Around 87% of enterprises in the country are using AI solutions. These technologies are widely applied in sectors such as finance, healthcare, and manufacturing. The scale and growth of AI startups, estimated at nearly 180,000 startups, with significant generative AI clusters in Karnataka (39 %) and Maharashtra (14 %), further underscore India's emergence as a hub of innovation²⁷. AI adoption is evident in sectors such as banking, healthcare, retail, and technology. For instance, around 68 % of companies in the banking and financial services sector and 60–65 % in the technology sector²⁸ have already deployed AI solutions. In comparison, healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors show adoption levels of about 52 %. These sectoral trends illustrate how AI is becoming embedded across the Indian economy.

India's growing scale of AI activity further demonstrates its potential to influence global AI governance. Between June and December 2025, Indian enterprises recorded approximately 82.3 billion AI and machine-learning transactions, representing 46.2 % of total AI activity in the Asia-Pacific region²⁹. This level of technological engagement places India among the most active AI ecosystems globally.

India's intermediary role is evident in its diplomatic engagement and multilateral initiatives. Through global forums and partnerships, including the India AI Impact Summit 2026 and the Group of Twenty (G20), India promotes inclusive, responsible, and equitable AI governance.

Thus, India possesses both the capacity and the diplomatic positioning to act as a bridging actor in global AI governance. Its large digital market, expanding technological capabilities, and emphasis on inclusive

digital development position the country as a potential mediator between advanced AI powers and developing economies.

CONCLUSION

AI is reshaping global governance, economic competition, and international power structures. As countries compete to develop advanced AI technologies and influence global rules, digital governance has become an important area of international politics. In this evolving landscape, India is emerging as a significant actor due to its large digital population, expanding technological ecosystem, and growing diplomatic engagement.

This study shows that India's AI strategy combines domestic capacity building with international cooperation. Initiatives such as the IndiaAI Mission, expansion of digital public infrastructure, and investments in data, computing, and startups demonstrate efforts to strengthen the country's technological base. These initiatives support economic development and enhance India's credibility in global AI governance discussions.

India is also actively engaging in international forums and partnerships to shape emerging digital norms. Platforms such as the India AI Impact Summit 2026 highlight India's efforts to promote ethical, inclusive, and human-centred AI while ensuring that the concerns of developing countries and the Global South are represented.

However, several structural challenges remain. Dependence on foreign technologies, limited semiconductor capacity, regulatory complexities, and shortages of skilled professionals constrain India's technological autonomy. At the same time, competition from major AI powers such as the United States, China, and the European Union creates additional pressure.

Despite these challenges, India occupies a unique position in the global AI landscape. Its emphasis on affordable innovation, inclusive digital infrastructure, and responsible AI governance enables it to bridge the gap between advanced economies and developing countries. If India continues to strengthen domestic capabilities while maintaining active international engagement, it has the potential to become an essential contributor to global AI governance and a key voice in shaping the future of digital politics.

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