

G2





This policy brief highlights the challenges in attaining effective global digital governance. These include uncertainty regarding the ethical, operational, and strategic implications of digital technologies, and limited avenues for private sector expertise. The G20 is well-placed to effect meaningful change in global digital governance. The brief proposes three recommendations: (1) the establishment of a 1 a a 1



The Challenge

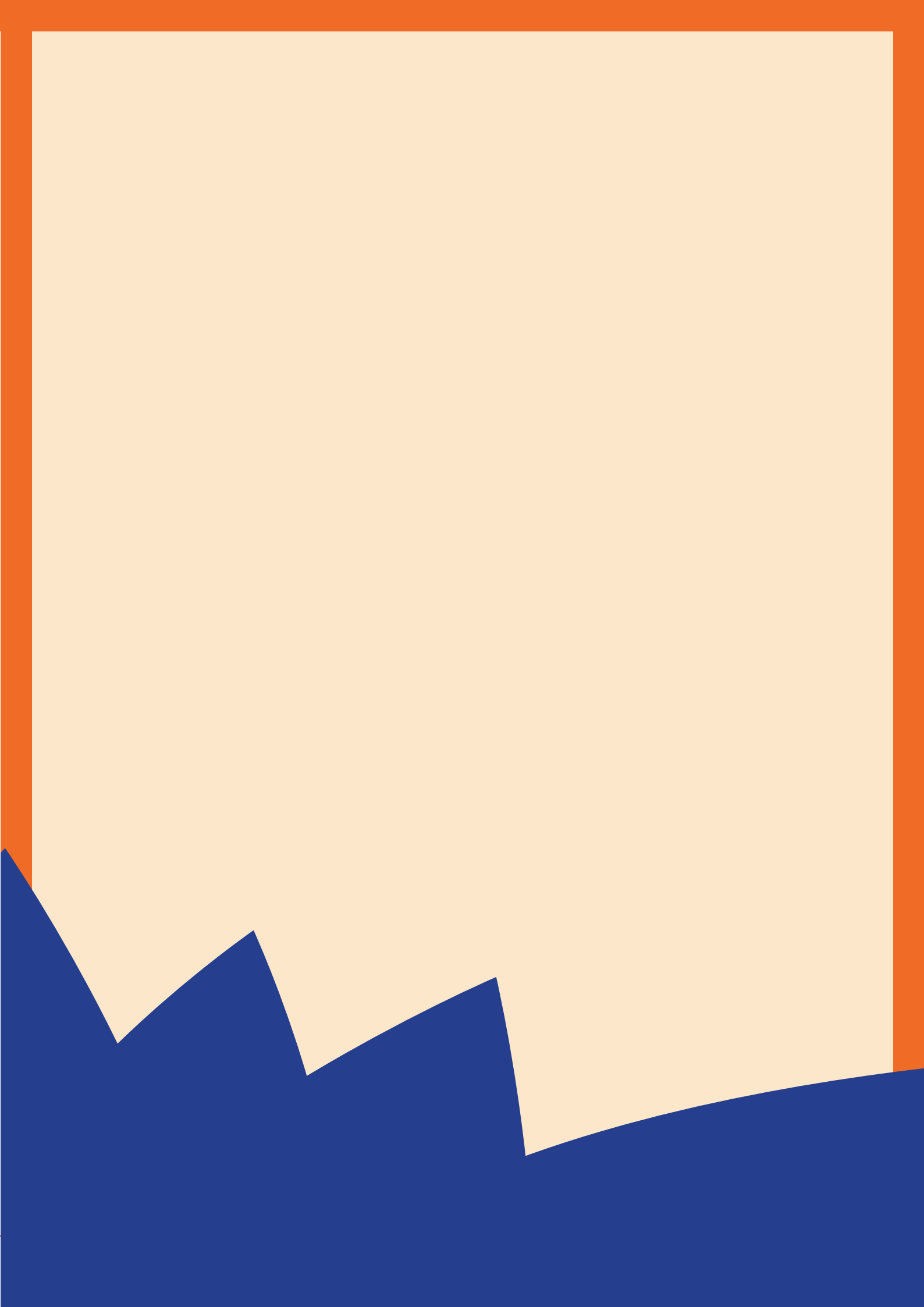



Effective global digital governance has proven relatively difficult to attain. Despite the United Nations (UN) General Assembly's 2015 endorsement of UN norms of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace,¹ the voluntary and non-binding nature of those norms have had limited impact on restricting actual state conduct in cyberspace. States continue to pursue cyber warfare capabilities and utilise those capabilities for grey zone operations. In the three months between January and March 2023 alone, approximately 38 “significant cyber incidents” were detected—meaning one attack every two days.²

Although international legal frameworks exist to regulate state conduct in traditional domains such as the maritime seas (the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea), no such equivalent exists for the cyber



capable Generative AI, is poised to further expand states' 'cyber toolbox'. It is this uncertainty that states grapple with when faced with formulating cyber norms—or any other form of digital global governance effort for that matter—and is reflected in the differing viewpoints advocated by states when discussing digital cooperation issues. For example, at discussions at the UN Open-ended Working Group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs; hereafter, the UN OEWG), the Zero Draft of the 2022 Annual Progress Report highlighted the need to “develop common understandings on technical ICT terms”.⁴ Such uncertainty over the direction of digital technology trends is also compounded by different national conditions. As states are at different levels of digital development and ICT capabilities, they often have





The G20 has a key role in shaping and strengthening the architecture of global governance. The G20 represents over 85 percent of the global GDP, over three-quarters of global trade, and two-thirds of the population worldwide. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council are also G20 members. All of this indicates that the G20 has tremendous potential when it comes to addressing global issues and effecting meaningful change.

With its engagement groups, the G20 is well-placed to integrate multistakeholder views and facilitate substantive progress in the field of global digital governance. Since 2016, issues pertaining to the digital domain have been on the G20's agenda. Initiatives such as the establishment of the G20 Digital Economy Working Group (DEWG), the G20 AI Principles, and annual G20 Digital Ministers Meeting are indicative of such efforts. The G20 is also well-positioned to complement other global efforts—a good example would be how the 2016 New Industrial Revolution Action Plan and 2021 Multi-stakeholder Forum on Digital Transformation in Production

for Sustainable Growth align with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. There is, however, room for improvement, considering how existing efforts are noticeably geared towards providing advice to governments regarding bolstering their national economic capabilities (for example, upskilling workers, greening digital transformation, improving cybersecurity knowledge) at the expense of the development of actual global digital governance frameworks.

The challenge of global digital governance is ultimately one that should be addressed through multistakeholder approaches as contributions from the





from previous experiences with multilateralism and global governance that have successfully incorporated private sector expertise. Successful examples can be drawn from the fields of nuclear non-proliferation, space cooperation, or climate change. For example, the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification is a public-private partnership that helps tackle transnational challenges such as monitoring and verifying nuclear disarmament. Another example of private sector players contributing to tackling global challenges include Space Situational Awareness initiatives, where private companies partake in information-sharing as part of government-led efforts to ensure that space activities are conducted in accordance with international law. This indicates that when managed correctly, the private sector can indeed play a role in global governance efforts. The G20 should therefore establish a task force to help identify key learnings from such examples and use the insights to enhance future efforts at global digital governance.

Launch a new Sherpa Track initiative that facilitates discussions between senior leaders regarding topics of global digital governance

To complement the work of the previous two recommendations, the G20 should also launch a new initiative under the G20 Sherpa Track that serves as an inclusive platform to bring together senior officials to meet on a regular basis and collectively discuss topics of global digital governance. This initiative, complemented by insights from the scientific advisory committee and public-private partnership task force (as mentioned in the previous two recommendations), can serve as a springboard for states to attain minimum-level consensus and agree upon global digital governance mechanisms that can be scaled up in the future. The G20

Endnotes

- 1 United Nations General Assembly, Seventieth session, Agenda item 92, December 30, 2015, A/RES/70/237
- 2 Center for Strategic and International Studies, "Significant Cyber Incidents", accessed July 20, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/programs/strategic-technologies-program/significant-cyber-incident>
- 3 United Nations General Assembly, Seventy-fifth session, Agenda item 98, March 18, 2021, A/75/816
- 4 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, Zero Draft of 2022 Annual Progress Report of the Open-ended Working Group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies, June 22, 2022
- 5 United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, Final Substantive Report of the Open-ended Working Group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies, March 10, 2021, A/AC.290/2021/CRP.2
- 6 Cybersecurity Tech Accord, "Industry Perspective Rejected: Cybersecurity Tech Accord releases joint statement on veto by UN cyber working group", July 21, 2022, <https://cybertechaccord.org/industry-perspective-rejected-cybersecurity-tech-accord-regrets-decision-by-states-to-reject-participation-in-un-open-ended-working-group-on-cybersecurity/>

