

EPIGS'25 PROGRAMMATIC LEARNING BRIEF

Electoral, Platform, and Information Integrity
Summit of the Global South 2025 (EPIGS'25)



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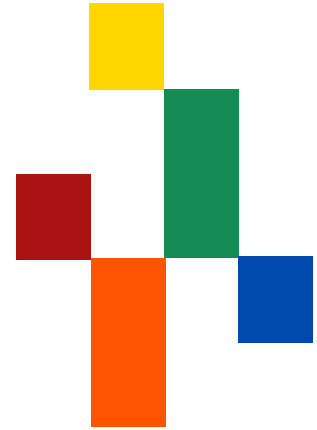


DEMOCRACY
REPORTING
INTERNATIONAL



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Agenda and Event Format Related Learnings

The following points are based on audience response and engagement patterns observed by the Factum team members, as well as survey responses.

- **Agenda flexibility:** Keep videos, energizers, or entertainment prepared to break up similar agenda items and maintain participant engagement, especially if there are last-minute changes to the agenda, which push similar segments together.
- **Provide for more interactions with the audience:** Limit total speaking time in panels by either reducing the number of panelists or allocating shorter speaking slots. Generally, limiting the number of panelists is recommended, as it allows for a more comprehensive presentation by the panelists, yet more time for audience Q&A and interaction.
- **Country profiles:** For future events, encourage delegates to focus on local solutions and actions in addition to issues. This provides a more balanced, solutions-oriented perspective, and a more interesting presentation as well; solutions alone start sounding similar too soon. Also, focus on country-specific case studies, particularly from underrepresented regions.
- **Session structure:** Separate distinct topics like legal and content-based solutions (e.g., panel number 4) into different panels to avoid confusion and ensure focused discussions. Consider adding one "youth-led" panel to spotlight next-generation thought leadership.
- **Interactivity and engagement:** Incorporate more interactive formats, such as group dialogues, breakout sessions, and longer Q&A segments in panel discussions, to encourage deeper engagement and peer learning, especially on more region-specific areas, and in a more solution-oriented manner. Many participants found these formats, along with the group brainstorming sessions, to be the most valuable part of the event.
- **Diversity of voices:** Actively include more grassroots voices and activists from marginalized communities (e.g., persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people) to enrich discussions with lived experiences.
- **Composition of the audience:** Representatives of tech platforms should have been there.

- **Content delivery:** Ensure sessions are concise to maintain energy and focus. Use diverse content delivery methods, such as case studies and presentations on specific issues, to keep the audience engaged.
- **Information sharing:** Having more post-session summaries or materials available in real time could have helped.
- **Accessibility:** Provide accessibility features like live captioning and sign language interpretation and consider offering a hybrid (in-person and online) model to make the event more inclusive.
- **Networking:** Facilitate networking better, perhaps through post-session social spaces, collaborative working groups, action labs, or digital communities, to sustain momentum and encourage long-term partnerships.
- **Venue and logistics:** Choose a venue that is less expensive, easier to navigate, and more accessible for all participants, including those traveling long distances. Accommodation for long-distance participants should also be arranged more in advance.

In general, many participants found the intersectional lens, incorporation of lived experiences, academic insights, diversity of voices, and the emphasis on regional collaboration valuable and commendable. They also found the expert interventions valuable, to understand that there is, in fact, expertise in the Global South. Participants had also realized the power of collaborative problem-solving across different countries and sectors, which revealed how shared challenges can be addressed through innovative, context-specific approaches.





COMMON ISSUES ACROSS THE GLOBAL SOUTH

This section outlines common issues in the Global South related to electoral, platform, and information integrity, identified through country profiles and panel discussions.

The promise of digital technology to expand civic participation is being reversed. Participants in the Summit noted that the benefits of digitalization are being undermined by online authoritarianism and digital governance mechanisms that suppress dissent. Instead of promoting equality, these platforms often amplify existing societal biases and injustices. It was observed that democratic processes are being eroded while maintaining a facade of legality, which makes them harder to challenge through traditional methods. Activists are finding it increasingly difficult to organize online because of new legal and technological barriers.

- **Electoral manipulation via digital platforms**

There are numerous issues related to elections in the region that undermine free and fair elections, entrench digital voter suppression, and erode public trust in the electoral process. While most of these issues are tied to social media, it is important to keep in mind that election manipulation predates social media. Social media and the internet have just given wings to old problems.

- **Inability to monitor campaign finance, particularly on social media**

Political parties are increasingly using social media as their primary campaign platform, and the spending on these campaigns is hard to track. This is compounded by the use of influencers who are often paid with benefits or offline payments, circumventing existing laws. There is also no uniform definition for “political advertising,” and the term “political content” is often left to the discretion of platforms, with some, like Facebook, having no definition at all.

- **Coordinated information campaigns**

Coordinated campaigns are used to spread false information and malicious narratives about candidates or political parties. These campaigns often originate from seemingly "non-political" or highly partisan pages that are, in fact, working for a specific political agenda. The content is frequently disguised as newsworthy content, making it difficult for the average user to distinguish. In many parts of the Global South, this type of coordinated disinformation is being systematically refined and normalized. Due to its significant influence on election outcomes, some have even coined the terms “content election” or “influence election.” The hallmark of such campaigns is that visibility, virality, and velocity determine narrative dominance.

- **Microtargeted disinformation**

Microtargeted disinformation is being used to manipulate how voters think and to suppress voting. This tactic uses behavioral profiling and microtargeting based on a person's caste, religion, location, and other personal data. This all happens without the voter's knowledge or consent, making it a very effective and deceptive tool.

- **Erosion of public trust in election results**

This is a growing problem, mainly due to delays in the transmission and announcement of results. When people cannot see the results in real-time or soon after they have voted, it breeds suspicion and diminishes their faith in the entire electoral process.

- **Voter and party suppression**

Party suppression is done through exerting legal pressure on parties and restricting media coverage of certain parties. Voter suppression is done through disrupting connectivity for certain voter bases during elections. This creates an environment of fear that deters voter participation and disrupts voting.

- **Voter data misuse**

There are instances of Election Commissions' records being used to provide social cash transfer in certain countries. These countries often have weak data protection laws or authorities. There is a legal vacuum, as there are no sector-specific norms that govern how political parties collect, process, or utilize voter data.

- **Disenfranchisement of certain communities**

Biometric identity programs, when integrated with voter databases, can lead to the disenfranchisement of marginalized communities. Because of documentation gaps, many people in these communities are unable to register to vote. These programs are sometimes implemented in violation of court guidelines, under the guise of eliminating duplicate registrations. Individuals who lack proper documentation or face barriers with technology are particularly at risk. Furthermore, entrenched inequalities are also present, often resulting in a significantly lower number of registered female voters compared to men.

- **Internet shutdowns during elections**

During elections, some countries use internet shutdowns, both nationwide and in specific areas, to control the flow of information. While the stated goal is to combat misinformation, these shutdowns are a disproportionate restriction on free speech and the right to information, and research shows they are an ineffective method to combat misinformation.

- **Platform failures during elections**

Platforms often struggle to enforce blackout periods during elections, remove hyper-partisan content, and act on misinformation promptly.

- **AI being unable to provide credible election-related information**

Most chatbots are currently unable to provide credible election information. For instance, in the EU, Google's Gemini chatbot has been updated to no longer answer election-related questions directly. Instead, it directs users to official election commission websites for accurate information.

- **Use of AI for election campaigning**

The use of AI in election campaigning is a growing concern because of its potential to manipulate voters and undermine fair elections. For example, in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election, a candidate used an AI avatar to soften his image and appeal to young voters, a strategy that coincided with his win. This case highlights why such tactics are problematic: an AI avatar can be used to create a persona that is detached from the candidate's true self or political record.





CENSORSHIP

Censorship amounts to growing thought policing, which results in the distortion of freedom of expression and the right to information. It stifles dissent, delegitimizes opposition, erodes socio-political pluralism, and shrinks civic space. On the other hand, it empowers digital authoritarianism under democratic veneers.

- **Lack of clear definitions**

Some countries have laws and regulations that stipulate that the government has the authority to force tech companies to take down content that has the potential to disturb public order or trigger public unrest. However, there is no clear definition as to what amounts to disturbing public order or triggering public unrest. Some laws have vague offenses like “cyberstalking,” which is used to imprison journalists and critics.

- **Online censorship through regressive laws**

Many countries are implementing regressive laws to enforce online censorship. These laws are often passed without transparency, judicial oversight, or clear appeal mechanisms. They use vague terms and contradictory frameworks to criminalize legitimate speech and block content under broad pretexts like “national security,” “morality,” or “religion.” In some cases, these laws can even force journalists to reveal their sources. Some of these laws go further by design, with steep fines and a reversal of the burden of proof, requiring users accused of disinformation to prove their own innocence. This strategic use of the legal system to suppress dissent has been labeled “lawfare.”

- **Platforms’ disengagement with civil society**

Platforms and governments engage directly in negotiations about what is allowed and not allowed in a country. But these platforms rarely engage with civil society. What ends up happening is that voters' and people's digital rights get compromised because only the states and the platforms engage and their decision-making process around content removal and censorship is opaque. Information on blocking orders and state takedown requests is not published, and right-to-information requests are denied.

- **Monopoly of the state over the marketplace of ideas**

In some countries, there is an official government fact-check unit to take down any and all false or misleading content related to the businesses of the government. That establishes a monopoly of the state over the marketplace of ideas, making the state the sole arbiter of truth. However, in some countries, the judiciary has stepped up to stay the operation of these fact-check units and declare them unconstitutional.

- **Extending traditional licensing and content control mechanisms to digital creators**

Some countries have proposed Bills that seek to extend traditional licensing and content control mechanisms to digital creators. If enacted, these laws impose registration obligations and compliance protocols designed for cable broadcasters on individuals who publish on social media.

- **Target of alternative media**

Independent and dissident voices, including journalists and activists, are facing disproportionate scrutiny or censorship from state agencies. This has led to the systematic suppression of independent news sources.





ONLINE GENDER AND SEX-BASED VIOLENCE

Online harassment and violence against women and gender minorities are on the rise, undermining the democratic principles of equality and inclusivity. This behavior amplifies and entrenches patriarchy online, pushing these groups away from political and public life. While cybercrime laws exist, they often fail to protect victims and are instead used to suppress dissent. Women, especially activists and journalists, face targeted abuse, including threats, doxxing, and coordinated attacks, designed to silence and intimidate them.

- **Targeted harassment campaigns**

Women and gender minority activists are facing consistent targeted harassment campaigns, particularly those with dissenting or progressive views. Digital platforms often reproduce and amplify existing gender inequalities, creating a hostile environment that reinforces traditional power structures and limits women's participation. This harassment and the associated threats force them to either self-censor or withdraw from online discussions altogether, which reduces the diversity of perspectives in public debate. This creates significant barriers to digital citizenship, as unequal access to safe online participation undermines democratic principles and prevents the full civic engagement of all segments of society.

- **Legal loopholes**

In some countries, a significant legal loophole exists. Cybercrime laws often fail to include specific measures to combat online intimate partner violence and online child sexual abuse. This allows these serious offenses to fall through the cracks, leaving victims unprotected.

- **Weaponization of cybercrime laws**

Cybercrime laws are increasingly being weaponized against dissenters rather than being used to protect victims. Instead of holding perpetrators of online harassment accountable, these laws are selectively enforced against critics, activists, and journalists. In a particularly alarming trend, cybercrime laws are also being used against women and gender minorities who report online harassment and assault. This, combined with the misuse of criminal defamation laws, means that victims of online sex- and gender-based violence (OSGBV) often find no legal recourse, leaving them without protection or justice.

PLATFORM ACCOUNTABILITY GAPS AND GOVERNANCE FAILURES

Platform policies and their enforcement often prioritize Western contexts, creating a two-tiered system of digital rights. Users in the Global South receive less attention, fewer resources, and delayed responses to critical issues.

Please note that the issues mentioned here are in addition to the platform governance failures related to elections discussed earlier.

- **Delayed or inadequate content moderation response**

Delays and failures in content moderation have devastating consequences, especially for marginalized groups. When platforms are slow to act on hate speech, disinformation, and coordinated harassment, these vulnerable populations are left unprotected. The negative effects of inadequate content moderation fall disproportionately on them, as they face unchecked abuse with minimal intervention or support from the very platforms where harassment takes place.

- **US-centric content moderation**

Platforms are applying US-centric content moderation policies globally, which are often mismatched with local contexts. Platform enforcement often aligns with US foreign policy as well, rather than with the diverse needs and realities of the Global South.

- **Inadequate local language resources**

A major challenge is the inadequate local language resources on platforms, which is not due to a lack of revenue. Platforms have failed to invest sufficiently in local-language moderation tools and ad libraries. This is particularly problematic for low-resource languages, where a lack of available data prevents the effective training of large language models. As a result, these platforms struggle to recognize localized slurs and hate speech terms, allowing harmful content to go unaddressed. Automated content moderation without adequate human oversight in these contexts exacerbates the problem, leaving communities vulnerable to unchecked abuse.

- **Unclear responsibility structures**

Platform governance is hampered by a lack of clear accountability. There are often no clear content escalation paths for users to follow, and platforms frequently lack in-country representatives who can address local issues effectively. This is compounded by frameworks that are not localized and a lack of transparency, resulting in ambiguous accountability for content decisions.



SURVEILLANCE, DATA MISUSE, AND PROFILING

New technologies have enabled enhanced surveillance without adequate safeguards, creating a high risk of comprehensive political behavior tracking. This has a chilling effect on political expression, as citizens self-censor out of fear of surveillance. Ultimately, this undermines democratic participation and erodes public trust in institutions.

- **Limited checks on the data access powers of the government**

Limited checks on the government's data access powers are a major concern. There are only a few safeguards or independent authorities to oversee and regulate state access to citizen data, which can lead to a lack of accountability and potential misuse.

- **Citizen profiling and political tracking**

The risk of citizen profiling and political tracking is a major concern that undermines democratic expression. Voters and activists face excessive monitoring of their online activities, often with no proper oversight. This data is used to create detailed profiles of their political views and affiliations, a process that is frequently automated. Because this behavioral profiling is often carried out by algorithms, it is difficult for individuals to detect and challenge, posing a significant threat to privacy and free political expression.

- **No due process**

There is a significant lack of due process in surveillance and censorship decisions. Citizens have no legal protection or recourse against these measures, as there is an absence of judicial oversight or an appeals process.

- **Use of AI for surveillance**

While public discussion often fixates on generative AI and deepfakes, a more significant threat lies in unregulated surveillance automation. AI is already being used for large-scale, real-time social media monitoring, mapping voter sentiment, and running predictive targeting campaigns. These systems operate with a lack of transparency and independent oversight. Without proper regulation, these technologies deepen informational asymmetry, where one party (the state or a political campaign) knows far more than the other (the voter), making voters highly vulnerable to manipulation. This is exacerbated by the limited frameworks for AI governance that exist beyond generative AI.

SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE THROUGH LEGAL MEANS

Shrinking of civic space through legal means involves passing or strategically enforcing laws to limit freedom of speech, assembly, and association. These laws often include vague clauses related to national security or public order, which are then used to justify the targeting of journalists, activists, and NGOs. As a result, organizations find it harder to operate, receive funding, and speak out against government actions, effectively chilling dissent and consolidating the power of the state.

• Laws used for digital surveillance and control

These laws grant governments extensive powers to monitor citizens' online activities, often without independent oversight. The goal is to track political behavior and affiliations.

Examples:

- *Bangladesh: Cyber Security Act, 2023 (repealed)*
- *Nepal: National ID Act, 2020 (mandates biometric IDs) and National Cyber Security Policy, 2023 (proposes a government-controlled internet gateway)*
- *Zambia: Cyber Security Act, 2025 and Cyber Crimes Act, 2025*

• Laws criminalizing dissent and speech

This category includes laws with vague definitions that are used to suppress criticism, intimidate journalists, and silence opposition. They often penalize “false” or “misleading” information, with the government as the sole arbiter of truth.

Examples:

- *Pakistan: Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 (thought policing)*
- *Nepal: Electronic Transactions Act, 2008 and Social Network Bill, 2025 (criminalizes fake profiles and false information)*
- *India: The Fact Check Unit under IT Rules 2023, which allows the government to determine what is "fake" or "misleading"*
- *Zambia: Cyber Security Act, 2025 and Cyber Crimes Act, 2025 which criminalize the publication of "false" information online*

- **Laws restricting online access and censorship**

These laws provide governments with the authority to shut down the internet, block accounts, or control content, often under the pretext of national security or public order.

Examples:

India: Telecommunications Act, 2023, for internet shutdowns before elections, and the Information Technology Act, 2000, for online censorship

Nepal: National Cyber Security Policy, 2023 (proposes a government-controlled internet gateway for censorship)





OTHER TRENDS

- **The rise of digital oligarchy**

The rise of digital oligarchy presents a significant challenge to global politics. The influence of a few major tech platform owners over national and international affairs is becoming increasingly apparent. This concentration of power is a serious concern, leading governments to take legal action. For instance, both the United States and the European Union have filed lawsuits against Meta, which responded by paying a fine. In stark contrast, when faced with a lawsuit in Nigeria, the company threatened to exit the country, highlighting a two-tiered system of accountability based on a country's economic and political power.

- **Legal and constitutional reforms are increasingly serving those in power**

Legal and constitutional reforms are increasingly being used as a tool to entrench the power of ruling elites rather than to promote genuine legal improvement. When these changes are pushed through without broad political consensus, they often become partisan and highly controversial. Instead of strengthening democratic institutions, these strategic legal changes are used to target political opposition and civil society, effectively equating political pluralism with a security concern. This erodes public trust and undermines the very principles of a democratic system.

- **Judicial avoidance**

In South Asia, a concerning trend of judicial avoidance is emerging. This happens when courts are unwilling to hear particularly sensitive cases or intentionally delay issuing a ruling. This avoidance often applies to matters of national security or those involving powerful political figures, where a ruling could have significant political consequences. This practice weakens the rule of law by leaving critical legal questions unresolved.





SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS

Throughout the Summit, a wide range of solutions were proposed to address the challenges outlined above. While many of these ideas were suggested for a specific problem, it became clear during collation that most of them could help solve multiple issues. Therefore, they are presented together rather than being categorized under separate challenges. The solutions that received a high number of votes during a group brainstorming session are mentioned with a star rating, indicating strong participant agreement on their viability. Solutions proposed outside of this session, such as during panel discussions, were not part of the voting process and do not have a star rating.

- **Global South gatherings and collective knowledge production**

This was the most popular solution, receiving the highest number of votes at the end of the brainstorming session. The core idea is to hold consistent gatherings and conferences for the Global South (a solution that received 29 stars) to foster the sharing of networks and knowledge. A key element is ensuring that tech giants also attend these events, so they are directly exposed to the concerns and perspectives of the Global South. Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of South-to-South collaborations in knowledge production, a solution that garnered six stars.

- **Counter-narrative creation**

This involves simplifying complex topics that often lead to misinformation and transforming them into simple, clear messages for campaigns aimed at grassroots and mass communities. Participants also emphasized the importance of pre-bunking, proactively inoculating audiences against false narratives before they spread, rather than trying to debunk misinformation after it has already taken hold.

- **Creating credible information**

When a vacuum of credible information exists, bad actors will fill it with disinformation. The most effective way to counter this is not by asking platforms or governments to intervene, but by providing more accurate information ourselves. We need to focus on the free flow of information, correcting facts, and addressing the root issues that create disinformation in the first place.

- **Digital literacy and online safety education**

There should be education focusing on building digital literacy and promoting online safety, ensuring all users can navigate digital spaces safely and securely. These programs help prevent harm before it occurs and make the internet a safer place for everyone. Training in cybercrime laws, too, has been suggested (5 stars).

- **Media literacy**

Media literacy campaigns received 11 stars as a popular solution. Participants agreed that because information influences the decisions people make and the opinions they hold, teaching people how to assess what they consume is vital. However, it was noted that people often lack the time or interest to attend dedicated sessions. A key suggestion was to embed media literacy in existing institutions like school curricula. Participants also stressed the importance of treating consumers with respect. We should avoid the elitist trap of labeling those who fall for misinformation as “unthinking masses.” This narrative only creates more division. The reality is that anyone can fall victim to disinformation, given their sophistication, regardless of their background or level of knowledge.

- **Equip journalists to safely use AI**

This involves providing training on how to responsibly integrate these tools into their workflow, such as for transcribing interviews, or summarizing reports. Simultaneously, journalists must be educated on the risks, including the potential for AI models to hallucinate or be deliberately manipulated to create disinformation.

- **Expand internet access**

Expanding connectivity enables more people to exercise their right to free speech online. A wider, more inclusive online community can enrich public discourse and provide a platform for diverse voices that might otherwise be unheard.

- **Prolong the law-making process**

Participants emphasized the need for a prolonged and inclusive law-making process, highlighting that new laws should not be enacted without robust public consultations involving all stakeholders, including experts, community groups, tech representatives, and ordinary citizens. A key strategy suggested was to create alternative redrafts of proposed laws.

This approach, which received four stars, allows civil society to present a clear, unified position and actively participate in shaping legislation. However, it is most effective when there is an existing draft to work from; it is less useful when the collective position is that a law should be repealed entirely. Participants also stressed the importance of judicial oversight in the law-making process.

- **Monitor legislative implementation**

A key suggestion was to ensure the implementation of laws is independently reviewed. The results of this review should then be shared with lawmakers and journalists. A related, highly popular solution was to



create a multi-stakeholder, collaborative oversight body to monitor this process, which received 21 stars.

- **Draft laws that act in combination**

The European Union has taken a leadership role in shaping digital legal policy with a combination of legal frameworks. The Digital Services Act (DSA) holds online platforms accountable for the content they host, compelling them to protect electoral integrity and provide transparent, accurate information. The General Purpose AI Code of Practice sets rules for the development and use of artificial intelligence, ensuring that AI systems are safe and trustworthy. The Code of Practice on Disinformation is a voluntary framework that encourages platforms to fight the spread of false information. Meanwhile, the Digital Markets Act tackles monopolies to reduce the influence of digital actors in shaping public opinion and, by extension, the outcomes of electoral processes. This combination of binding law and voluntary codes creates a strong and coordinated approach to regulating the digital space, and the Global South should adopt such a combination of laws and regulations.

- **Adapt data protection frameworks**

A popular suggestion, receiving 11 stars, was to adapt the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) for the Global South. This would provide a strong foundation for building data protection laws to safeguard user data, not just from tech companies but also from governmental institutions. This concept includes establishing clear rules for consent and implementing robust data protection and surveillance regulation laws to protect citizen privacy.

- **Change laws and policies**

Changing election laws is a crucial step to improve transparency. We need to mandate the real-time publication of election results, since in some countries, while votes are counted digitally, the results are not made available immediately. It is suggested that the election commission publish preliminary, official results on an open portal in real-time. Additionally, laws should be changed to declare disinformation and hate speech as electoral offenses. Legislation should be passed requiring internet shutdowns or connectivity interruptions to be approved by the judiciary beforehand.

- **Evidence-based strategic litigation**

This was a popular solution, scoring 18 stars. This legal approach seeks to establish positive, rights-respecting precedents, even if judicial outcomes are slow or incomplete. A key strategy is to focus on specific administrative grounds; for example, in cases of internet shutdowns or censorship, you

can challenge the government to uphold due process and demand a copy of the blocking or internet shutdown order. Even when litigation fails, it serves to document issues, spark public debate, and build advocacy, especially when lawyers coordinate to file lawsuits on similar issues across different jurisdictions.

- **Public interest litigation**

This involves judges taking a more activist approach. It is particularly effective when there is no law to address a specific issue. For instance, in Bangladesh, with no legal framework for sexual harassment in the workplace, the courts stepped in and created detailed guidelines. These guidelines were enforced for fifteen years until a specific law was finally passed by parliament. Courts have also used this method to compel regulators to create content guidelines or have created their own as part of a ruling.

- **Utilize a wide range of laws**

Beyond strategic litigation, public interest lawsuits, and constitutional lawsuits invoking fundamental rights, there is a significant opportunity to apply a broader range of laws to hold tech platforms accountable. These include:

- Competition or antitrust lawsuits: These can challenge a platform's market dominance and anticompetitive behavior.
- Consumer protection lawsuits: These can address issues like misleading claims or unfair practices that harm users.
- Tort laws: These can be used to sue for damages resulting from a platform's negligence or harmful actions.

Using these diverse legal avenues allows for a more comprehensive approach to platform accountability.

- **Leverage legal precedent**

Seeking positive legal precedent through legal intervention was a popular solution, receiving eight stars. Participants noted that citing progressive precedents from the same region or other Global South nations can be effective, as judiciaries are often more receptive to these examples. However, a major barrier is that many countries in the region have a domestic, sovereignty-focused approach to interpreting laws, and there is no regional court (unlike in Europe) to enforce consistent legal standards.

Despite these challenges, establishing a legal precedent brings legitimacy and formality to efforts to hold tech platforms accountable. A good starting point would be to create a repository of positive legal precedents from the Global South.

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- **Introduce safe-harbor provisions for platforms**

Criminalizing platforms for the content they host discourages collaboration with the legal process. To encourage their cooperation, it is essential to introduce safe harbor provisions that protect them from liability for user-generated content.

- **Push for algorithmic solutions**

Instead of relying solely on human review or policy changes, we should advocate for technical interventions built directly into platforms. This could involve creating algorithms designed to detect and flag harmful content, promote diverse information, or ensure fairness in how content is distributed. By focusing on the underlying technology, we can create more scalable and effective systems for holding platforms accountable.

- **Demand more built-in features**

Instead of placing the entire burden of content moderation on platforms, users can play a more active role. To make this possible, we need to demand more built-in features that support proactive user engagement. A good example is X's Community Notes, where users can fact-check posts and add sources. This model is more democratic because it is the community, not a government or the platform itself, deciding what information is inaccurate.

These community-driven mechanisms are both more sustainable and easier to use. WhatsApp's feature that limits forwarding messages to five people is an effective design choice that helps curb the spread of misinformation. Contextual explainers, AI labels, and provenance tags were also mentioned as possible built-in features. By pushing for more of these built-in features, we can create a system where no single entity controls content moderation, making platforms more democratic and less prone to harmful narratives.

- **Broaden research on how platforms operate**

We need to broaden our research on how platforms operate. This includes a closer look at their revenue streams, algorithms, and policies on freedom of expression and privacy. We should also investigate content takedown rates and internal governance models, with a special focus on how platforms are using AI labeling and other new technical improvements.

- **Establish a transparent accountability process**

Establishing a transparent accountability process is a crucial solution for building trust between tech platforms, civil society, and governments. This process should clearly define what constitutes a violation and outlines a consistent procedure for addressing breaches. By making the rules and associated penalties public and consistent, all stakeholders are aware of the consequences. This way, when a tech platform is fined for a violation, they will not feel cheated because the penalty is a predictable outcome of a pre-established, clear procedure. This approach ensures fairness and encourages compliance by replacing arbitrary decisions with a standardized system.

- **Train large language models**

To combat the issue of large language models providing misleading electoral information, tech providers should train their chatbots to refrain from providing electoral information altogether, and the Election Commissions should actively collaborate with them to monitor election-related output.

- **Establish a digital election monitoring authority**

This independent statutory body would monitor social media and digital platforms for coordinated inauthentic behavior, such as bot networks, and call it out in real-time. This authority should be separated from the existing election commission to ensure independence, providing a channel for the public to file complaints and hold both platforms and the election commission accountable. This suggestion had received 10 stars.

- **Improve elections and internet governance**

It was proposed to guide outlets on how to handle election coverage and make it part of the law, such as mandating fair airtime for all candidates and parties. It was also proposed that the community guidelines of tech platforms be officially combined with individual countries' election codes of conduct to ensure consistent and fair digital practices. This latter suggestion had received 7 stars.

- **Create coordinated solution platforms**

Participants cited the crowd-sourced incident reporting platform USHAIDI as a prime example. These platforms, which received seven stars as a suggestion, would include representatives from all political parties as well as digital and civic partnerships. They would serve as an independent body, separate from the election commission, and function as a key part of the digital election monitoring system.



- **“12 Countries, One Campaign”**

Participants suggested a highly popular (25 stars!) solution: a unified advocacy campaign across Global South countries with similar messaging and a single theme for a set period. For example, the campaign could focus on "consent" for three months, with all participating organizations creating content on that topic. Including a clear identifier like “12 Countries, One Campaign” on each piece of content will enable the public to recognize it as part of a collective Global South effort.

- **South-to-South partnerships on specific issues**

While south-to-south partnerships were a suggested solution for a range of issues, they were highlighted as especially effective for tackling specific problems like online sex and gender-based violence (OSGBV). A successful example cited was a transnational feminist tech collective that shares best practices for addressing OSGBV across the region.

- **Partnerships between Global South governments**

Participants agreed that governments in the Global South should form more partnerships. Citing the European Union as an example, they noted that the EU has successfully implemented progressive laws by acting as a unified bloc. In contrast, legal change in the Global South often requires 150 separate efforts across individual countries. Therefore, building partnerships and making collective demands, especially among Election Commissions from multiple nations, is crucial for driving meaningful change.

- **Include women and gender minority Communities**

A popular and highly rated solution (with 11 stars) was to ensure the inclusion of women and gender minority communities in technology regulation and platform mediation. Participants emphasized the need to invest in digital initiatives that prioritize the voices and lived realities of these communities.

This approach involves magnifying the role of groups led by women and gender minorities that are already working to create safer online environments. It also highlights the crucial importance of centering the experiences of survivors of online sex and gender-based violence (OSGBV) when designing preventive and response initiatives. By listening to those who have directly navigated existing legal and technological frameworks, we can build survivor-centric, accountable systems that are far more effective.



- **Targeted sites of influence**

To influence decisions on platform governance, we must target sites of influence where decision-makers are present. This means being in the same spaces as the people who make these decisions, such as the media outlets they read, the shareholder meetings they attend, and the conferences they participate in.

By publishing our research and perspectives in these forums, we can expose them to new ideas beyond their usual sources, encouraging them to consider what's happening in different markets. Another crucial point is to find champions within both the government and private companies. This approach, which received nine stars, acknowledges that meaningful change will not happen without state intervention and collaboration with governments.

- **Create regional social media guidelines**

Creating regional social media guidelines to align standards across different countries would be particularly impactful because the Global South represents a significant target market for tech companies. By coming up with a common guideline, these countries can better hold tech companies accountable.

- **Detect repeated offenders**

To combat online harassment and misinformation, it was suggested to create a demerit system to track repeat offenders. This system would apply a form of punishment, such as suspension or removal from the platform, after a user's third or fourth offense. This strategy targets the same users who consistently commit violations, helping to curb persistent negative behavior.





BROADER SOLUTIONS

A core theme that emerged from EPIGS'25 was the fundamental connection between technology and its political and social context. A question raised throughout the Summit was whether democratic digital spaces can be reclaimed without reforming political will and governance. The consensus was clear: they cannot. The following section explores the broader solutions discussed at the Summit, which aim to address the root causes of the challenges in electoral, platform, and information integrity by tackling systemic issues beyond just the digital sphere.

- **Parliamentary reforms**

Suggestions for ensuring fairer elections included the introduction of a bicameral parliament, proportional representation, and national referendums on key constitutional issues. Additionally, participants mentioned the need to reform parliamentary structures to ensure term limits, accountability, and inclusive governance.

- **Expansion of rights**

Constitutional rights should be expanded to include digital freedoms, due process protections, and safeguards against enforced disappearance and extrajudicial killing. Participants also called for stronger Right to Information (RTI) laws. Furthermore, laws governing the search and seizure of personal belongings need reform. In some countries, a police officer can confiscate personal devices like computers or phones without a court order, simply based on suspicion, and then seek a court order retroactively if they feel a threat exists.

- **Transparent judicial proceedings**

In Pakistan, for example, the superior judiciary took a historic step to increase transparency in election-related legal challenges. For the first time, they televised the proceedings of important cases, allowing the public to watch legal and political challenges unfold in real time rather than just reading about them later. This move helped generate legitimacy and fostered public trust in the electoral process.

- **Enforcing international law obligations**

A powerful way to enforce international human rights obligations is by bringing legal challenges that compel positive action. Traditionally, courts have had a negative right related role, i.e., protecting against rights violations. However, they also have a positive role: to impose obligations on governments to create new laws when there is a legal vacuum. A key example is the Vishakha case in India, where the Supreme Court established guidelines on sexual harassment and directed the government to enact a law. This demonstrates how courts can actively push for legal reform in line with international human rights standards.

- **Independent constitutional institutions and oversight commissions**

Participants suggested independent constitutional institutions through depoliticized appointments and new oversight commissions on human rights, elections, anti-corruption, judicial independence, and institutional reforms, such as constitutional reforms and electoral reforms.

- **Increase support to media**

The concentration of resources in a small number of media outlets weakens informational diversity and limits the variety of perspectives available to the public. In many countries, even development assistance for media is funneled to just a few select organizations. To combat this, participants suggested creating a fund supported by philanthropic investment. This fund would specifically support a wider range of media outlets, promoting plurality and diversity in public interest media. It would provide institutional support, allowing media organizations to invest in their teams, governance, and knowledge, fostering self-sustainability and independence. Developing a public policy for media had also received many votes.

- **Address social polarization**

Social polarization exacerbates divisions to the point of becoming pernicious. There needs to be initiatives that address those, as those are the divisions that get to the digital space.

- **Enrich AI**

AI models are trained on data available on the internet, which often lacks access to "closed" information specific to local contexts. To prevent misrepresentation by AI, a collaborative effort is needed, bringing together civil society, governments, and experts to ensure this crucial local information is used to train AI models, making them more accurate and relevant to our societies.

- **Human rights framework for businesses**

Introducing human rights frameworks for businesses involves demonstrating to companies that respecting human rights can positively impact their bottom line, as it can make them more receptive to the idea. It also includes emphasizing state responsibility. The governments must be held accountable for the actions of companies operating within their borders. They cannot allow companies to create harmful technology just for profit.

- **Build alternatives to tech**

Relying solely on big tech platforms for community organizing and mobilization is risky. As a solution, alternatives for tech, specifically local

community spaces that are owned and controlled by the people who use them should be introduced. These spaces would provide a dedicated and safe environment for individuals to interact, share information, and organize, free from the constraints and control of corporate entities.

- **Civic education frameworks for all**

Investing in robust, collective civic education frameworks is crucial for promoting positive change. Focusing on cultural and behavioral aspects is particularly important, as interventions at this level are essential for creating lasting impact.

- **Support gender-transformative efforts**

To prevent online sex and gender-based violence (OSGBV), it is essential to support gender-transformative efforts that address its root cause: gender inequality. These initiatives aim to challenge and change the social norms, attitudes, and power imbalances that fuel violence both online and offline. By investing in programs that promote gender equality, we can create a safer and more inclusive digital environment for everyone.

- **Strengthening civil society**

Participants overwhelmingly agreed on the importance of strengthening civil society, as evidenced by the high number of votes this solution received. A strong, vibrant civil society is seen as a key component for addressing complex challenges related to electoral, platform, and information integrity, and for holding both governments and tech companies accountable. Laws targeting NGOs and civic organizations should be contested.







STRATEGIES FOR THE WAY FORWARD

- **Increase engagement with political parties**

Engaging with political parties is essential as they are the crucial bridge between people and the state. Even if the state is resistant to certain reforms, political parties are accessible and can be a vital point of influence. Political parties from across the Global South should be brought together, perhaps not as formal members of civil society coalitions, but as key stakeholders, to collectively pressure tech companies for meaningful change.

- **Do robust monitoring**

Robust disinformation monitoring is crucial for building effective response mechanisms, as an effective response is impossible without reliable information that an incident has occurred. Proving the effectiveness of this approach, the Indonesian constitutional court banned the excessive use of AI for election campaigns, which was a direct result of robust monitoring. Increasing the capacity of civil society organizations for monitoring and documenting human rights violations enables them to conduct community-led human rights impact assessments. This is especially important as there is a common demand that tech platforms perform such assessments themselves.

- **Build cross-sector coalitions**

Building coalitions across different sectors is vital. A strong example is the collaboration between civil society organizations and media outlets. These coalitions can go beyond traditional fact-checking to also perform pre-bunking, which involves preemptively debunking false narratives before they spread. In Indonesia, a coalition of civil society organizations and media successfully conducted live fact-checking during candidate debates.

- **Exert public pressure**

To effectively influence tech companies, it is crucial to exert public pressure. Companies are highly sensitive to their reputation and stock market performance, both of which are directly impacted by media reports and company rankings. Therefore, leveraging social and traditional media to highlight issues is a very effective strategy.

- **Consolidate efforts**

CSOs and experts should consolidate their efforts. A single, unified organization could bring together various CSOs and individual experts in digital rights and tech accountability. The structure of this organization should be transparent and open. For example, accountability committees, which are typically exclusive to board members, could be opened to the entire membership, including CSOs and individual experts.



- **Engage with tech platforms as an alliance**

Big tech platforms are strategically investing in both governments and civil society organizations, which often makes it difficult to demand accountability from them. However, by forming alliances, organizations can share their concerns with trusted partners. This collective approach allows them to surface issues more effectively and gain a stronger voice in accountability processes. A large, unified organization would also be able to access information that tech platforms would not reveal to single organizations or individuals.

- **Be intersectional**

We must adopt an intersectional approach to our work. As a case in point, a ruling by the Indian Supreme Court on the accessibility of online digital spaces has created a new avenue for digital rights advocates to collaborate with disability activists. The Ministry for Disability Affairs in India has guidelines mandating that certain government websites include features like screen readers. The Indian Supreme Court has taken steps to make its own websites more accessible to people who are deaf and blind, for example, by removing CAPTCHA codes that previously hindered access to judgments or orders. These efforts demonstrate how a focus on intersectionality can lead to a more equitable digital public sphere for everyone.

- **Be the middle-person**

Civil society must act as a middleperson between governments and tech platforms, which are often competing to control digital space. The civil society can help them create a balance by engaging with objectivity and presenting themselves as partners in development. Civil society organizations are culturally embedded, resourceful, passionate, and technically proficient, making them ideal partners for both governments and tech companies in creating a more equitable digital environment.

- **Be consistent in engagement**

Platforms want to engage with stakeholders who are willing to participate consistently with them. For example, there have been instances where platforms took down content that was reported by local trusted partners who consistently engaged with them, even though that content did not go against their Community Standards. Small efforts can go a long way in building lasting relationships.

- **Produce local knowledge**

To ensure platform governance is meaningful, it is crucial to produce local knowledge. There is currently a lack of understanding of local concerns, including local languages and cultural nuances. Traditional journalistic

outlets, while not digital-first, remain highly effective and can go a long way in producing this vital knowledge.

- **Share lived realities**

India has been promoting its digital public infrastructure, such as its digital ID and payments systems, as a helpful and inclusive model for other low- and middle-income countries. The Indian government has been pushing that narrative strongly and silencing criticisms of it. Sharing lived experiences and highlighting the exclusions that some people face in this system has been instrumental in countering that narrative.

- **Push for measuring efficacy**

There must be a push for measuring the efficacy of legal and governance frameworks, rather than settling for simple compliance. Right now, that is not happening. For example, governance frameworks may inquire, "When training your AI models, do you have annotator diversity?" To meet compliance requirements, they must simply answer "yes" or "no." No need to actually have annotator diversity. Tech companies often only make the minimum effort to comply with regulations, but they are highly motivated by competition, as they are constantly trying to be better than their competitors. The Global South can use this to its advantage by creating granular, public benchmarks and evaluations that measure things like cultural alignment. This approach goes beyond a simple "yes" or "no" answer, providing a tangible way to hold companies accountable and publicly demonstrate when their models fail to meet local needs.

- **Be intentional about the distribution of information**

In today's attention economy, simply creating content and putting it out there is not enough; it must be distributed effectively. Relying on social networks alone is insufficient, as these platforms are often closed to those who cannot or will not pay. This makes it crucial to develop local, hyperlocal, and connected technology solutions that originate from and serve the Global South. Achieving this will require bringing together diverse stakeholders, including government, civil society, media, influencers, and religious leaders, to create information distribution systems that make sense to our society.



PRINCIPLES FOR GLOBAL SOUTH COOPERATION

- **Be interpersonal:** Talk to each other and talk about each other's perspectives. That is foundational to any Global South cooperation.
- **Strive for cohesion in outputs:** There is a lot of brilliant work produced by Global South countries on these themes, but some of the work tries to overwrite the narratives of others rather than work with them. Instead, focus on the cohesion of narratives.
- **Focus on tangibility:** In principle, what coalitions and partnerships produce is often correct, but there is little tangible input on how large language models or social media platforms can practically change. This is mostly because there are not many technologists or policymakers in the room. Their presence and active participation in Global South cooperation efforts are needed to translate what coalitions are saying in principle into something tangible.
- **Replicability is key:** Observing the methods of civic advocacy for tech accountability used by other Global South countries can lead to replication. If a certain method proves effective with governments or tech companies, it can be replicated in other countries. Repressive actors always learn by looking at others; civil society needs to do the same.
- **Collaborating with the Global North in knowledge production:** Collaboration in knowledge production among countries in the Global South is crucial. However, it is equally important to involve the Global North in this process. This could be achieved by having co-authors from the Global North or by publishing on Global North platforms, which would significantly increase the visibility of the work produced by Global South actors.





RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE TOPICS BASED ON THE SURVEY

Following EPIGS'25, we surveyed participants to gather their suggestions for topics on electoral, platform, and information integrity they would like to see covered in more depth at future events and EPIGS iterations. The responses are summarized below.

- **AI-related topics:** Deepfakes; synthetic media; source credibility in the age of generative AI; the role of AI in shaping public discourse; counteractions on AI-generated mis/disinformation
- **Tech-related topics:** How to ensure correct information is provided in search engines; algorithmic transparency; algorithmic bias in content moderation; accessibility of civic tech platforms; how to control misbehavior of apps; gender-based violence on social media
- **Election-related topics:** The role tech platforms and governments can play in ensuring online electoral integrity; cross-border influence operations and coordinated disinformation campaigns targeting elections; the role of election management bodies; how electoral disinformation disproportionately affects marginalized communities, especially persons with disabilities; voting rights of transgender people; gender based violence in elections; political finance and integrity; strategies to counter disinformation campaigns during elections; accountability of digital platforms in ensuring transparency and integrity of elections
- **Media and digital literacy-related topics:** Fact-checking; grassroots-level misinformation and disinformation in local languages, especially in rural communities; digital literacy programs that empower citizens
- **Law-related topics:** Suppressive laws; regulatory frameworks that balance information integrity with freedom of expression
- **Safety-related topics:** Digital safety and protection for journalists, election monitors, and civil society actors, especially in politically sensitive contexts
- The intersection of gender, disability, and online political discourse in the Global South
- How the national and regional dimensions of electoral and information integrity are violated - A deep dive
- Civic education

- **Youth engagement**

In addition to the above topics, a general suggestion was to expand on existing discussions and follow up on actions that were agreed upon at EPIGS'25. There was interest in discussing the specific actions various stakeholders, such as the government, the opposition, the diplomatic community, and administrative authorities, can take. There was general interest in focusing on tools and policy responses specific to the Global South, with attention to South-to-South collaborations. Participants also wanted opportunities to engage with platform representatives.





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