The Trump Effect
on Digital Resilience
in the Global Majority

GLOBAL NETWORK FOR
Social Justice &
Digital Resilience

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This brief, written by Juan Ortiz Freuler, was commissioned by the **Global Network for Social Justice and Digital Resilience** (DRN) as part of the DRN's forecasting and fundraising stream of work. It aims to explore current and future trends, and relevant issues facing the digital rights and digital resilience ecosystems in the Global South.
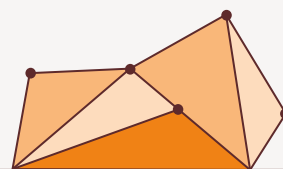
The brief does not necessarily reflect the views and perspectives of the DRN members.

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I.
FOREWORD AND GOALS

At the beginning of 2025, the Social Justice and Digital Resilience Network (DRN) released a report called **"Scanning the horizon: the future of digital rights and resilience in the global majority"**, a paper that intended to catalyze and inform conversations about the changing context in which organizations and individuals working for the protection and advancement of human rights and digital resilience develop their activities. It was a forecasting exercise, one that the DRN considered strategic in order to help its members and other allies from the ecosystem in their decision making facing the future. This exercise aimed to increase the organization's ability to anticipate risks and take precautionary measures in the coming years.

Things have changed during the past months. In a context of great uncertainty, three things are certain: First, that out of the current turmoil a new order will emerge; second, that such order will not be neutral, but have positive and negative consequences for our communities; and third, that once the new order is established it will be difficult to reform it. To continue the exercise of forecasting, the DRN commissioned this brief that outlines the acceleration or disruption of the trends identified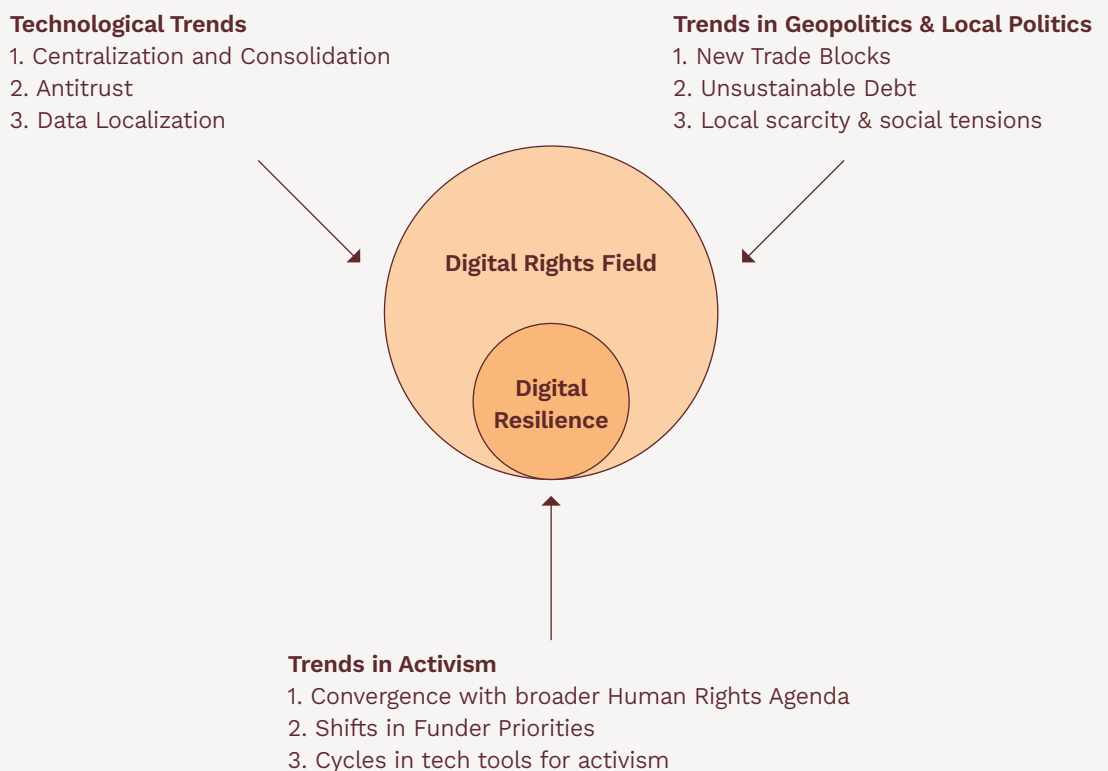 earlier this year. The brief is not an update of the **Scanning the Horizon** report, but rather a dialogue with it. It also offers three deep-dive elements that respond to questions that have emerged during different conversations among the network members and the extended ecosystem.

Figure 1. Sketch of the forces shaping the digital rights and resilience landscape.

Technological Trends
1. Centralization and Consolidation
2. Antitrust
3. Data Localization

Trends in Geopolitics & Local Politics
1. New Trade Blocks
2. Unsustainable Debt
3. Local scarcity & social tensions

Digital Rights Field

Digital Resilience

Trends in Activism
1. Convergence with broader Human Rights Agenda
2. Shifts in Funder Priorities
3. Cycles in tech tools for activism

II.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
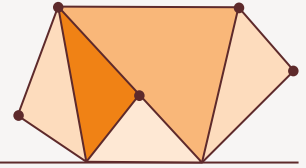
Trump's electoral victory is the expression of a demand for radical change. Six months into Trump's government, it seems we can expect these demands for change to be channeled towards a program that is nationalist while favoring the traditional US elites and white men. This document explores how Trump's presidency (and the underlying currents that favored his victory) will shape the three pillars of the "Scanning the Horizon" report, not only during his mandate but over the decade to come:

1. **GEOPOLITICS: MORE NATIONALISM**
   Less interest in human rights frameworks operating at the individual level and coordinated through the international systems. More interest in the scale of the national: bilateral trade, industrial policy, national security.

2. **TECH: AI-BOOM DEAL-MAKING & MARKET CONSOLIDATION TRIGGERS POWER SHIFTS**
   As companies increasingly exploit network chokepoints to undermine competitors, the exercise of power is less dependent on corporate relationships with users (distributed), and more dependent on energy producers and the management and processing of data (highly consolidated markets). Nationalism, the erosion of the human rights agenda and the tech developments above explain a growing connection between the US and the Gulf countries.

3. **ACTIVISM: CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS LOSE ACCESS AND INFLUENCE**
   Whereas there is a cemented tradition of civil society participation in internet governance forums, this is not the case for debates on trade, national security, and industrial policy. Meanwhile, the increased corporate attention on business-to-business deals undermine the traditional role that civil society organizations played as bottom up structures to coordinate and consolidate insights from tech users.

III.
(GEO) POLITICAL PULSE:
MORE NATIONALISM
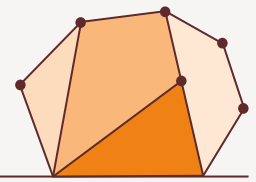
KEY TRENDS OUTLINED UNDER THIS PILLAR IN SCANNING THE HORIZON REPORT:
The report outlined three major trends under this pillar. These were that the US-China competition would shape how the Global Majority accesses technology, and that both the technologies themselves and the negotiation leading to them would shape the human rights landscape over the decade to come. Meanwhile, emerging trade blocs like BRICS were reshaping the balance of power towards China, while high levels of public debt both in central and peripheral countries were fueling a vicious circle of government austerity policies, protest, and government surveillance and violence (see page 6 of the SH Report).

PULSE OVERVIEW:
The America First platform is a nationalist reaction to the outlined trends, and in some cases and ways accelerates them. It moves power away from multilateral and multi stakeholder arenas, and onto bilateral negotiations between government leaders.[1]

US Goals:
- Shift to private bilateral negotiations where the US' position is relatively stronger.

- Allow Trump to be more creative, less accountable, and more arbitrary in dealmaking. This, in turn, makes US bilateral negotiation positions stronger in the short term, while potentially undermining its trustworthiness in the long term.

- Undermine global fora through which China is increasingly projecting its power globally.

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1. Among other sources, see: The Heritage Foundation, *Mandate For Leadership* - Project 2025, 2023, http://archive.org/details/project-2025-mandate-for-leadership-full_202309-manifesto

Key expressions and examples:

- The US government is less focused on developing global norms (e.g. defunding the UN).[2]

- US government sees international law as friction (e.g. sovereignty of Greenland,[3] support for Israel despite International Court of Justice provisional measures).[4]

- US interventions are targeted and focused on achieving narrow national goals (e.g. Ukraine minerals deal).[5]

Indirect Effects:

- More geopolitical instability.

- More economic instability.

EFFECTS ON TRENDS OUTLINED IN REPORT:

1. **EMERGING TRADE BLOCS: UNCERTAIN**
   a. Multipolarity goes mainstream: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio himself acknowledged the unipolar world is coming to an end.[6]

   b. BRICS shakes: US is tightening its connection with oil producing Saudi Arabia, which was a candidate to join BRICS and has a major trade surplus with China.[7] Meanwhile, India-Pakistan war adds tensions to India-China relations.

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2. White House, "Withdrawing the United States from and Ending Funding to Certain United Nations Organizations and Reviewing United States Support to All International Organizations," The White House, February 5, 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/withdrawing-the-united-states-from-and-ending-funding-to-certain-united-nations-organizations-and-reviewing-united-states-support-to-all-international-organizations/.

3. "President Donald Trump…has pressed even harder since taking office in January, refusing to rule out taking the island by force". See: Gram Slattery et al., "Exclusive: US Weighs Special Status for Greenland as Quest for Island Intensifies," *Reuters*, May 9, 2025, sec. World, https://www.reuters.com/world/us-weighs-special-status-grteenland-quest-island-intensifies-2025-05-09/.

4. Susan Akram and John Quigley, "Is International Law Still Relevant after the Carnage in Gaza?," *Arab Center Washington DC* (blog), May 30, 2025, https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/is-international-law-still-relevant-after-the-carnage-in-gaza/.

5. Andrea Shalal and Joey Roulette, "Exclusive: US Could Cut Ukraine's Access to Starlink Internet Services over Minerals, Say Sources," Reuters, February 22, 2025, sec. Business, https://www.reuters.com/business/us-could-cut-ukraines-access-starlink-internet-services-over-minerals-say-2025-02-22/.

6. "[Rubio:] It's not normal for the world to simply have a unipolar power. That was not – that was an anomaly. It was a product of the end of the Cold War, but eventually you were going to reach back to a point where you had a multipolar world, multi-great powers in different parts of the planet. We face that now with China and to some extent Russia". US State Department, "Secretary Marco Rubio with Megyn Kelly of The Megyn Kelly Show," United States Department of State (blog), January 30, 2025, https://www.state.gov/secretary-marco-rubio-with-megyn-kelly-of-the-megyn-kelly-show/.

7. See deepdive on petrodollar.

c. **Latin America closer to China:** Major meeting between regional body and China leads to Chinese investment commitments for $9 billion USD. Colombia joins the Belt and Road Initiative, which already boasts 21 members in the region. China removes Visa restrictions for 6 countries in the region.[8]

d. **The EU is moving sharply away from the US:** Some are questioning whether the US should be treated as adversary rather than competitor, and China is now more popular than the US among the EU public.[9] After 25 years, prompted by Trump's victory and growing Chinese influence in the region, the EU accelerated the signing of a free trade agreement with South America's Mercosur bloc.[10] The EU is also making progress towards a free trade agreement with India, which had stalled in 2013.[11] Meanwhile, the UK is seemingly geopolitically paralyzed, while its investors have overtaken China as the second largest holder of US Treasury bonds (after Japan).[12]

2. **PUBLIC DEBT LIMITING NEGOTIATION POWER: ACCELERATING**
   a. **Trump pressures peripheries to reduce US debt:** In order to reduce the US deficit, Trump is trying to ensure the US keeps a trade surplus with every country, which is increasing pressures on countries already in debt.

   b. **Trade instability fuels uncertainty:** US Government projections in March suggested economic stabilization and a gradual reduction in inflation.[13] Tariffs in April shook such projections. The US instability made peripheral markets relatively more attractive for private investors, while tariffs undermine the ability of emerging markets to access the hard currency necessary to repay the existing high levels of debt, making them riskier.[14]

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8. Simina Mistreanu, "China Seeks a United Front with Latin America in Countering Trump's Trade War," AP News, May 13, 2025, https://apnews.com/article/china-latin-trade-tariffs-us-jinping-de2a 3faa01ce6e98617cbecd74658c34.

9. Sylvie Kauffmann, "'Should the US Be Treated as an Adversary Rather than a Competitor? It's a Dizzying Question for Europe,'" *Le Monde*, February 5, 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/ article/2025/02/05/should-the-us-be-treated-as-an-adversary-rather-than-a-competitor-it- s-a-dizzying-question-for-europe_6737810_23.html; Giovanna Coi, "US Popularity Collapses Worldwide in Wake of Trump's Return," Politico, May 12, 2025, https://www.politico.eu/article/usa- popularity-collapse-worldwide-trump-return/.

10. Guillermo Garat and Isabel Debre, "The EU and a South American Trade Bloc Reach a Giant Trade Deal after 25 Years of Talks," AP News, December 6, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/uruguay- mercosur-european-union-trade-agreement-free-trade-south-america-44ca8d0eef524b84014ad 266c286f8fe.

11. PTI, "India, EU May Go for Comprehensive FTA; Investment, GI Pacts to Follow Later," *The Economic Times*, June 3, 2025, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/ foreign-trade/india-eu-may-go-for-comprehensive-fta-investment-gi-pacts-to-follow-later/ articleshow/121602131.cms.

12. CNBC, "Foreign Holdings of U.S. Treasuries Top $9 Trillion in March, Data Shows," CNBC, May 16, 2025, https://www.cnbc.com/2025/05/16/foreign-holdings-us-treasuries-trillions.html; US Department of Treasury, "Table 5: Major Foreign Holders of Treasury Securities," May 16, 2025, https://ticdata.treasury.gov/resource-center/data-chart-center/tic/Documents/slt_table5.html.

13. Federal Open Market Committee, "Summary of Economic Projections," March 19, 2025, https:// www.federalreserve.gov/monetarypolicy/files/fomcprojtabl20250319.pdf.

14. JP Morgan, "Can Emerging Markets Survive Trade War II? | J.P. Morgan Private Bank U.S.", 2025, https://privatebank.jpmorgan.com/nam/en/insights/markets-and-investing/can-emerging- markets-survive-trade-war-II.

3. LOCAL POLITICS IN A CONTEXT OF SCARCITY FUELING FRAGILITY: <mark>ACCELERATING</mark>

a. Automation of bureaucracy: Perceived as reducing cost... and centralizing power in fewer hands, reducing resistance to policy changes.[15]

b. Fueling of ethno-state logics: National identity can be construed in many ways.[16] Within the Trump administration there are powerful factions that understand nationalism as a vehicle towards an ethno-state.[17] Scarcity can fuel the narratives of an internal enemy.

   i. These US factions reinforce and promote "white genocide" narratives in South Africa, support the most radical Israeli zionist groups, while broad Islamophobia finds echoes in Hindu nationalism, among others worldwide.

DEEPDIVE INTERSECTION:
GULF COUNTRIES, TECH & THE PETRODOLLAR

1944 | Birth of the centrality of the US dollar: After the volatility, trade wars and inflation prior to WW2, world leaders met in Bretton Woods (USA) to design a financial architecture that would stabilize world trade. At the center of it was the USA, the strongest economy (~50% of world GDP) and the one with the most gold reserves (~75% of global gold reserves). Countries agreed to guarantee the convertibility of their own currencies into USD (needing USD reserves to do so, with many countries imposing capital controls), and the US would guarantee that these were, in turn, convertible into gold. This made USD the world's global reserve currency facilitating trade across the globe through a common currency, and allowing the US to print money (issue debt) with limited inflationary impact on its economy.

1970s | US abandons gold standard: During the Nixon administration, high trade deficits and budget deficits eroded US gold reserves. The government resolved to suspend gold convertibility, ending the Bretton Woods agreement. The USD remained a global reserve currency out of trust that the US economy was strong and stable, with US Treasury bonds being used by governments and private investors as a secure value storage and investment strategy. A key element of trust is expectations about the future of the US. Whereas in 1999 the USD accounted for 71% of currency reserves globally, this dropped to around 58% in 2024.[18]

15. Jeff Stein et al., "In Chaotic Washington Blitz, Elon Musk's Ultimate Goal Becomes Clear," The Washington Post, February 8, 2025, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/02/08/doge-musk-goals/.

16. Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

17. Sameena Usmani, "President Trump's First Week Begins with Rollout of White Supremacist Policies and Pardons," *Amnesty International USA* (blog), January 28, 2025, https://www.amnestyusa.org/blog/president-trumps-first-week-begins-with-rollout-of-white-supremacist-policies-and-pardons/.

18. Hung Tran, "Is the End of the Petrodollar Near?," *Atlantic Council* (blog), June 20, 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/econographics/is-the-end-of-the-petrodollar-near/.

KEY CHALLENGES TO US DOLLAR DOMINANCE:[19]
- **BRICS:** Russia has regularly called for the end of USD dominance in trade. Meanwhile, since 2009 China has signed bilateral swap agreements with over 40 countries in order to increase trade in their own currency.[20]

- **Volatility and decentralized sell-off:** In April 2025, for example, fueled by fear tariffs would trigger inflation, Japanese (largest holders) and European pension funds, among others, reportedly executed a major sell-off of old US bonds to reduce their exposure to the expected turmoil.[21]

KEY HISTORICAL SUPPORTERS:
- **Gulf countries:** Holding the largest reserves of oil, these countries operate as central nodes in the global trade system. They hoover in money from all across the world and have typically demanded these be USD. It was recently revealed that in 1974 Saudi Arabia struck a secret deal with the US, committing to price its oil in USD and to funnel its revenues into US Treasury and financial markets in exchange for protection and access to advanced weapons.[22] In recent years, this dynamic fueled investment in Silicon Valley companies like Nvidia, Uber, Slack and others, which were bankrolled by Japanese *SoftBank*. Around half of the $100 billion USD in SoftBank's Vision Fund came from Saudi Arabia. During Trump's 2025 visit to the region, Saudi Arabia committed $600 billion USD in investments in the US over four years.[23]

To put this $600 billion USD commitment in context, Saudi Arabia exported a total of $301 billion USD in 2023, placing them as the 26th exporters in the world. Their biggest trade surplus was with Japan, India and China, from which Saudi Arabia is getting a massive influx of cash. The US peaked its Saudi imports at $55 billion USD in 2012, during its wars in the Middle East, and before it embraced fracking technologies that reduced its dependence on foreign oil.[24]

19. See Paul Samson and Angelo Federico Arcelli, "Ways the US Dollar Loses Its Crown, or Not," Centre for International Governance Innovation, accessed May 17, 2025, https://www.cigionline.org/articles/ways-the-us-dollar-loses-its-crown-or-not/.

20. Benn Steil, "Central Bank Currency Swaps Tracker | Council on Foreign Relations" (NYC, USA: Council on Foreign Relations, October 2, 2024), https://www.cfr.org/tracker/central-bank-currency-swaps-tracker.

21. Lee-Yin Shan, "U.S. Treasurys Selloff: Investors Flock to Emerging Market Bonds," April 29, 2025, https://www.cnbc.com/2025/04/30/us-treasurys-selloff-investors-flock-to-emerging-market-bonds.html.

22. Andrea Wong, "The Untold Story Behind Saudi Arabia's 41-Year U.S. Debt Secret," *Bloomberg. Com*, May 30, 2016, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2016-05-30/the-untold-story-behind-saudi-arabia-s-41-year-u-s-debt-secret.

23. The White House, "Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Secures Historic $600 Billion Investment Commitment in Saudi Arabia," The White House, May 13, 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/05/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-secures-historic-600-billion-investment-commitment-in-saudi-arabia/.

24. Statista, "U.S. Imports of Trade Goods from Saudi Arabia 2023," Statista, 2023, https://www.statista.com/statistics/187711/volume-of-us-imports-of-trade-goods-from-saudi-arabia-since-1985/.

Figure 2. Saudi Arabia's trade with BRICS, USA and others (in billions, USD, 2023).[25]
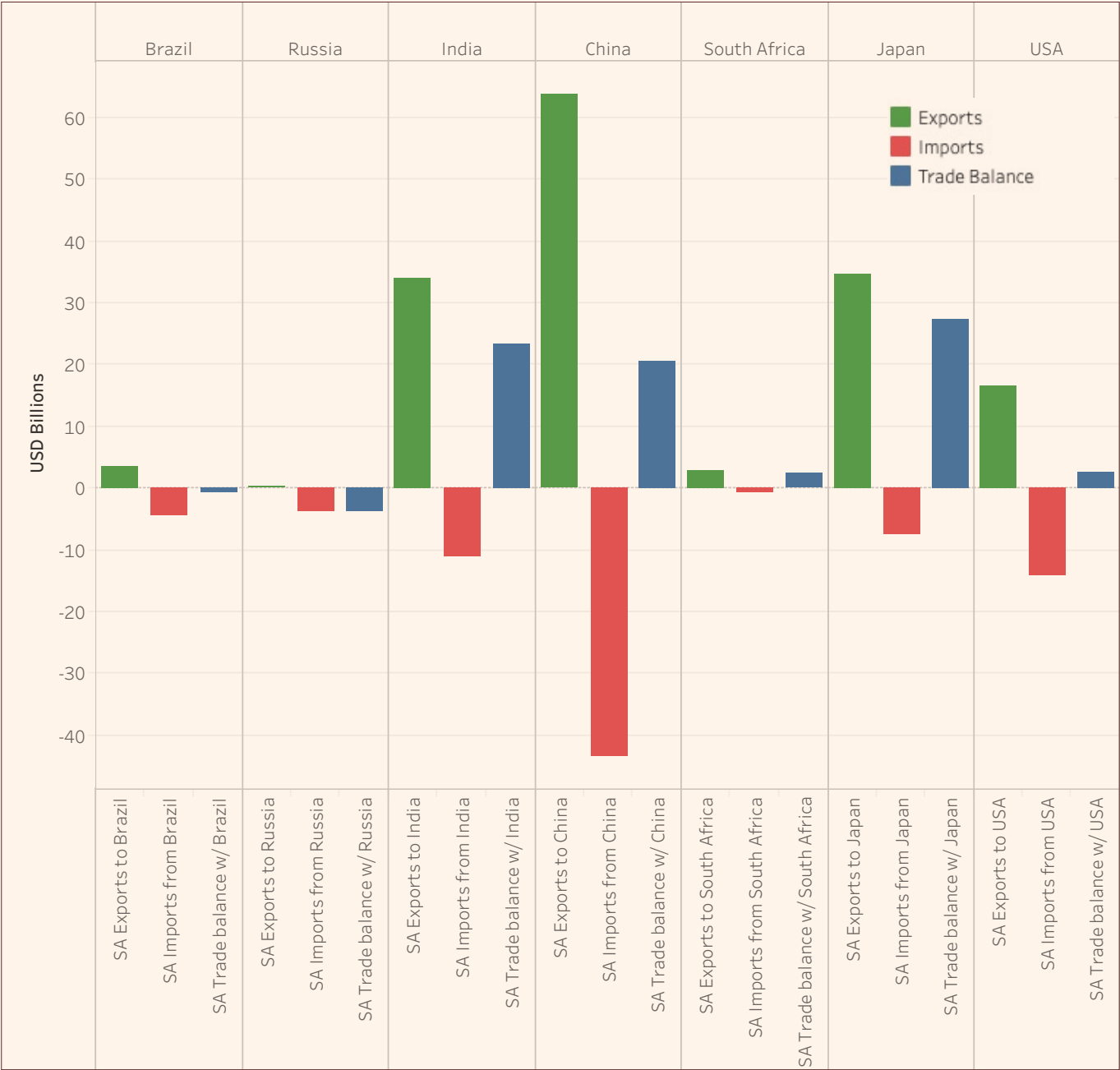
Note: The key is designed from the perspective of Saudi Arabia (Exports = Saudi Arabia Exports to China). Exports therefore represent an inflow of cash to Saudi Arabia (green), while imports (red) represent cash leaving Saudi Arabia. Click on image to explore underlined interactive data visualization.

25. Developed by the author using data from OEC: OEC, "Saudi Arabia (SAU) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners," The Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2025, https://oec.world/en/profile/country/sau.

Synthesis of Trump effect on geopolitics: a force pushing down and to the right. Towards greater degree of government power while the reach of frameworks is kneecapped by a focus on bilateral trade agreements, national security concerns, and industrial policy agendas.

Figure 3. An exploration of the locus of debates on tech governance in terms of reach and actors.
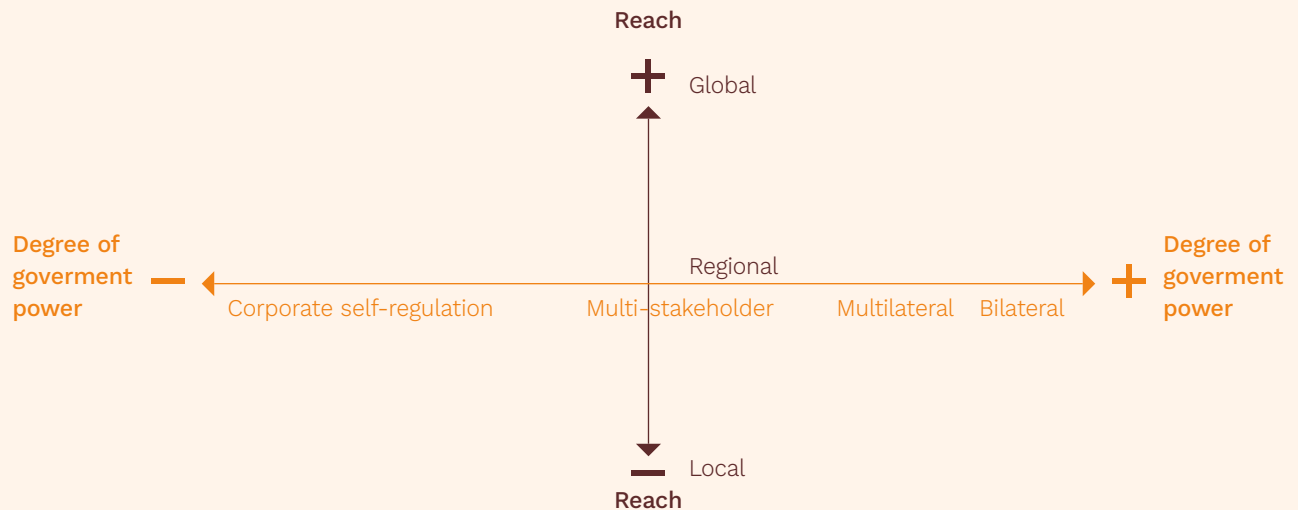
KEY THREADS FOR DISCUSSION: ENGAGE WITHIN NATION-STATE LENS?

Trump undermines interest in human rights frameworks: Time to adapt vocabulary and strategy?

Since Trump promotes a shift onto trade, industrial policy, and national security debates: should we follow, push back or find a new framework that is neither about shifting into narrow national economic interests or protecting the status quo?

Adapt and follow the Trump current		Push back and try to protect status quo		A New Framework?
Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons	***What would the goals be?*** ***Who would be the key allies?*** • Consumer protection groups? • Political parties? • Local government? • Religious groups? • Unions? • Local companies? • Universities? ***What would the core agendas be?*** • Emerging tech. • Digital Infrastructure. • Social impacts. • Political impacts. • Economic impacts.
Arriving early might give us an edge within the space.	There is limited access and transparency in the new arenas.	Consistency: Based on our mandates, rights are not a choice.	Risk of becoming irrelevant.	
Allows us to shape conversations where power is being exercised.	We have limited expertise in these areas.	Trump is circumstantial and he is not able to change these big structures.	Risk of not having funding in the long-run.	
Trying something new... The Human Rights approach had its own flaws and limitations.	Could be perceived as weak or convenient and undermine credibility.	Our long-term sustainability (and the well-being of our communities) depends on it.	Risk of being targeted.	

IV.
TECH PULSE: FOCUS MOVES TO NETWORK CHOKEPOINTS
→ CHIPS & ENERGY
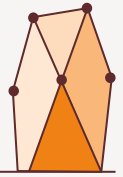
KEY TRENDS OUTLINED UNDER THIS PILLAR IN SCANNING THE HORIZON REPORT:
The report outlined three major trends under this pillar. On the one hand a process of network centralization, where power was increasingly in the hands of fewer companies. On the other hand, a set of counterforces seeking to redistribute that power: anti-trust in central countries, and data localization in both central and peripheral countries (see page 17 of the SH Report).

PULSE OVERVIEW:
The US nationalist policy coincides with an AI-boom hungry for chips and energy, sectors that are highly consolidated and regulated: perfect chokepoints for governments to exercise their power. It moves power away from consumer-facing products and towards areas where there are fewer players (relative to the distributed consumer-base) and where the US government has a stronger leverage through government regulation.

US Goals:
- Consolidate a US sphere of influence.
  › Match the energy powerhouses in the Gulf with chip-makers in Asia under US power.
  › Guarantee markets for US companies.
  › Undermine Chinese tech competitors.

Key expressions and examples:
US chip export controls suspended and replaced with bilateral deals.

- AMD and NVidia chip deals with the Saudis worth ~$35 billion USD.[26]

- Deals with UAE would allow it to import ~$15 billion USD in Nvidia chips until 2027.[27]

- Qualcomm, Cisco, IBM, Alphabet, Oracle, and Salesforce to invest ~$80 billion USD in the Gulf.

- Saudi Arabia's to invest ~$20 billion USD in US AI datacenters and energy companies.

- UAE to invest $1.4 trillion USD in energy and semiconductor projects on US soil over the next decade.

- Taiwanese TSMC chipmaker pledges $100 billion USD investment in the US.[28]

26. Geoffrey Seiler, "The Top Tech Stock Winners From Trump's $600 Billion Saudi Arabian Deal | Nasdaq", May 18, 2025, https://www.fool.com/investing/2025/05/18/tech-stock-winners-trump-600-billion-saudi-deal/.

27. Indranil Ghosh, "How Trump's Gulf Trip Turned Oil Kingdoms into Tech Superpowers," Rest of World, May 15, 2025, https://restofworld.org/2025/trump-middle-east-trip-ai-chip-tech-deals/.

28. AP, "Taiwan Says Chipmaker's Move to Invest $100 Billion in the US Wasn't Because of US Pressure," AP News, March 6, 2025, https://apnews.com/article/taiwan-us-tsmc-chips-investment-71d3aeb2bc403a92ce8eccdd8c51c0c8.

Indirect Effects:

• Growing interest in *tech sovereignty* and sovereign tech stacks in peripheries.[29]

• Energy powerhouses insert themselves into the tech race from below.

• Return of nuclear energy in the long-run and protection for existing coal plants now.[30]

EFFECTS ON TRENDS OUTLINED IN REPORT:

1. **CENTRALIZATION:** ==ACCELERATING==
   a. Power moving down the internet stack to areas where fixed costs are high and there are few players with enough capital to participate in.

2. **ANTITRUST:** ==ACCELERATING==
   a. **The Department of Justice (DoJ) continues investigations** into big tech (Federal Trade Commission does not).

   i. Despite many tech CEOs attending Trump's inauguration, many investigations into major companies continued: Department of Justice asked the court to force Google to sell Chrome:[31] Judiciary continued to target Apple's AppStore monopolistic practices.[32] Alphabet CEO framed anti-trust as threatening the US geopolitical position in the AI competition with China. Regulatory pressure might increase corporate willingness to engage in smoke-filled room negotiations with the executive. For example, Meta is now bidding for a contract to develop augmented reality devices for the US military.[33]

   b. **Enforcement of Digital Markets Act:**

   i. The EU fined most major tech companies for failing to comply with Digital Markets Act, including Apple (failing to open up its AppStore), and Facebook (failing to provide a distinct service that is not so heavy on data collection).[34]

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29. Alex Krasodomski, "The US–China AI Race Is Forcing Countries to Reconsider Who Owns Their Digital Infrastructure | Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank," May 11, 2025, https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/05/us-china-ai-race-forcing-countries-reconsider-who-owns-their-digital-infrastructure.

30. Casey Crownhart, "Can Nuclear Power Really Fuel the Rise of AI?," MIT Technology Review, May 20, 2025, https://www.technologyreview.com/2025/05/20/1116339/ai-nuclear-power-energy-reactors/.

31. Ryan Whitwam, "DOJ: Google Must Sell Chrome, Android Could Be Next", Ars Technica, March 10, 2025, https://arstechnica.com/google/2025/03/doj-google-must-sell-chrome-android-could-be-next/. For broader overview of investigations see https://www.theverge.com/23869483/us-v-google-search-antitrust-case-updates.

32. Lily Jamali, "Apple Hits Back at US Judge's 'extraordinary' Contempt Order", May 8, 2025, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3r8rg4w2v0o.

33. Jonathan Vanian, "Meta and Anduril Defense Startup Partner on VR, AR Project Intended for U.S. Army," CNBC, May 29, 2025, https://www.cnbc.com/2025/05/29/meta-anduril-partner-on-vr-ar-project-intended-for-us-army.html.

34. Jacob Parry, "EU Fines Apple €500M and Meta €200M for Breaking Europe's Digital Rules," POLITICO, April 23, 2025, https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-fines-apple-meta-breaking-europe-digital-markets-act-dma/.

3. DATA LOCALIZATION: <mark>ACCELERATING</mark>

a. European Union:

- **AI factories:** The EU has committed €200 billion for "AI Factories" plan.[35]

- **EuroStack:** Embracing technological sovereignty, key voices within the EU are promoting the idea of a *EuroStack* (including local storage).[36]

b. Gulf to host AI processing factories... for Africa and the EU?

- UAE struck a deal with OpenAI and Nvidia to build a major datacenter to be integrated as a "Stargate cluster".[37] UAE is among the top three countries to which AI experts have been migrating to, according to data scraped by OECD researchers from Linkedin.[38]

Figure 4. Tech numbers in context.
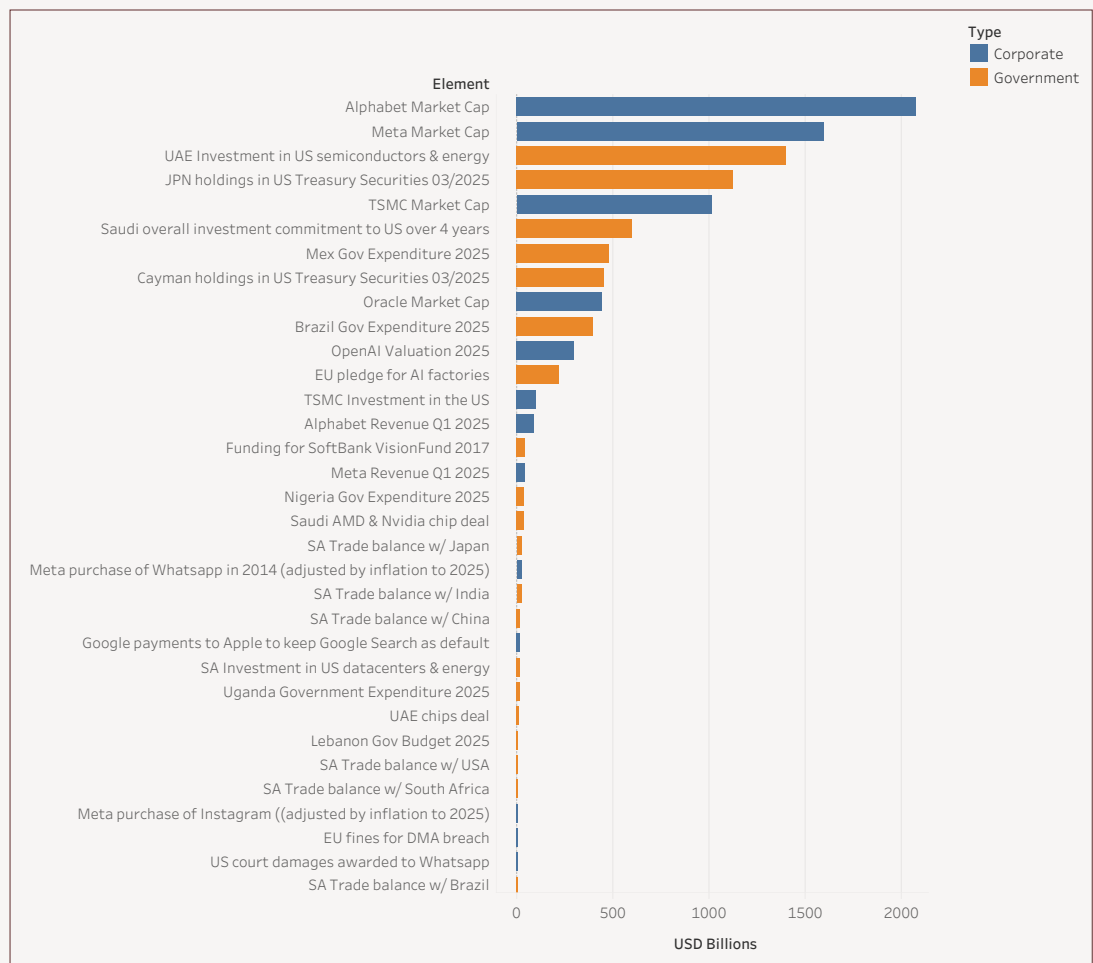
Note: Designed by the author. Click on image to access <u>interactive version</u>.

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35. EU Commission, "AI Continent Announcement," April 9, 2025, https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/ai-continent_en.

36. Francesca Bria and Sheikh, "Europe Must Avoid Becoming a Digital Colony," *Foreign Policy* (blog), May 22, 2025, https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/03/31/europe-digital-sovereignty-colony-trump-asml-ai-eurostack/.

37. OpenAI, "Introducing Stargate UAE," May 22, 2025, https://openai.com/index/introducing-stargate-uae/.

38. OECD.AI, "Live Data," 2025, https://oecd.ai/en/data.

DEEPDIVE INTERSECTION: SOVEREIGN TECH STACKS

Return of the state and the concept of digital sovereignty:
Over the past decade there has been a resurgence of concepts like digital sovereignty. The definitions and goals of the people and governments that rely on these terms vary widely: some see it as a way to devolve power to the people and away from centralized corporate structures, others see it as a tool to increase government control.[39] Either way, policymakers are now not just seeking to regulate, but to actively *develop* technologies. There appear to be three major strands:

Digital Public Infrastructure:
A bundle of technologies developed by the governments, typically presented as an upgrade of public infrastructure into the digital age. Although it is narrowly focused on government service provision, it is also considered to spur competition and innovation within the private sector. The most prominent example is **India**, which refers to its bundle as India Stack. The project began in 2009 and now includes digital ID, payments systems, data storage, and account aggregators to move financial data across apps and services. An example of how it shapes private sector dynamics is the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), which allows sellers on one platform (e.g. Amazon) to interact with buyers on others (e.g. Flipkart).[40] India is seeking to export the bundle of technologies as part of its soft power, and already has deals with Morocco, Ethiopia, Philippines and others. **Brazil** has its own success story in digitizing payments through a Central Bank initiative called *Pix*.[41]

Sovereign-stacks:
A conceptual tool developed by activist policymakers seeking to reduce dependence on US and Chinese tech providers. This is an acceleration of the de-risking and de-coupling trends (see page 19 of SH report)[42] now turned into a tangible program. In **Latin America**, LatamGPT, a regional response to ChatGPT seems to fit this narrative.[43] However, the EU is perhaps the most prominent example of a holistic approach: advocates of the **Euro-Stack** seek to find new players at every layer of the internet stack (from content to data storage). Some believe the pragmatic way forward is to engage with EU giants like ASML, SAP and Accenture in order to produce local alternatives to US and Chinese vendors. Others believe the EU should develop a more open model that does not seek to replicate the US giants. Within this group are many advocates for free software and critics of surveillance capitalism and energy consumption. In contrast with the India Stack, most Euro-stack advocates extend beyond digital public infrastructure and into the private sector.[44]

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39. Julia Pohle and Mauro Santaniello, "From Multistakeholderism to Digital Sovereignty: Toward a New Discursive Order in Internet Governance?," *Policy & Internet* (2024), https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.426.

40. India Stack, "India Stack," 2025, https://indiastack.org/.

41. Suyash Rai Burman Anirudh, "Comparing India's UPI and Brazil's Pix," *Carnegie India* (blog), September 13, 2022, https://carnegieindia.org/2022/09/13/comparing-india-s-upi-and-brazil-s-pix-|-how-censorship-shaped-literature-and-expression-pub-87894.

42. Emily Benson and Gloria Sicilia, "A Closer Look at De-Risking," December 20, 2023, https://www.csis.org/analysis/closer-look-de-risking.

43. LAP, "Latam-GPT: A Bold AI Path For Latin America," *LatinAmerican Post* (blog), March 31, 2025, https://latinamericanpost.com/science-technology/latam-gpt-a-bold-ai-path-for-latin-america/.

44. Cristina Caffarra and Stefane Fermigier, "EuroStack," EuroStack, 2025, https://euro-stack.eu/; Francesca Bria, Paul Timmers, and Fausto Gernone, "EuroStack – A European Alternative for Digital Sovereignty," 2025, 127 p., https://doi.org/10.11586/2025006.

Decolonial projects:
In line with EU free software advocates, this is an advocacy tool focused on breaking the traditional mold of technology: rather than seeking to incorporate private sector models into public infrastructure, or developing national copies of foreign platforms in the private sector, it proposes the public should more broadly reimagine tech.[45] Community networks are perhaps its most deeply rooted illustration,[46] with emerging indigenous sovereign data movements offering instantiations that can also speak to the AI-boom.[47]

Synthesis of the Trump effect on tech trends: a force that might push us closer to the top right quadrant in Figure 5 below, where places like the Gulf countries become regional AI hubs, acquiring more refined tools to shape tech policy and broader economic outcomes expansively. Meanwhile, there is a renewed interest in free software approaches, even in places like the EU, while the distrust of the Trump administration towards big tech might result in their downsizing (bottom left quadrant).

Figure 5. An exploration of the locus of tech infrastructure power.

Greater centralization around incumbent companies	Data localization spurs regional hubs of infrastructure and policy
Antitrust activist regulators re-decentralize the information system reassuring peripheries they will participate fairly	Country-level firewalls and localization create more isolated information spheres

KEY THREADS FOR DISCUSSION: TECH SOVEREIGNTY
If the United States, China, the European Union and others are increasingly focused on tech sovereignty, is that a vehicle to advance digital rights and resilience?

| Embrace the tech sovereignty agenda	
Pros	**Cons**
Might enable more robust public engagement with tech policy from our communities: more robust democracy.	Might enable greater abuses by our government (big tech doesn't care enough / our governments care too much). More surveillance/oppression.
Might enable local economic growth, more opportunities for our communities.	Might create more degradation of natural environment (e.g. datacenters and water).
Might unlock funding from local companies/governments.	Might isolate us technologically, making international coordination more difficult.

45. Cecilia Rikap et al., "Reclaiming Digital Sovereignty," December 3, 2024, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/publications/2024/dec/reclaiming-digital-sovereignty.

46. Fernanda R. Rosa, "From Community Networks to Shared Networks: The Paths of Latin-Centric Indigenous Networks to a Pluriversal Internet," *Information, Communication & Society* 26, no. 11 (August 18, 2023): 2326–44, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2022.2085614.

47. Tahu Kukutai and John Taylor, eds., *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Toward an Agenda*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) (Erscheinungsort nicht ermittelbar: ANU Press, 2016), https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/31875/624262.pdf?sequence=1.

V.
ACTIVISM PULSE: LESS FOCUS ON CONSUMERS. LESS ACCESS TO DEBATE
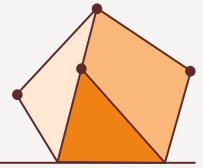
KEY TRENDS OUTLINED UNDER THIS PILLAR IN SCANNING THE HORIZON REPORT:
The report outlined three major trends under this pillar. These were: the convergence of agendas with the broader field of human rights, shifts in the funder landscape and the need to adapt and prepare rainy day funds, and the increasing challenges created for advocacy and activism by technological dependence and centralization (see page 26 of the SH Report).

Trump intervention: More Nationalism → More focus on chips and energy → Less focus on consumers → Less access to debate arenas

PULSE OVERVIEW:
On the one hand, at a global level, nationalism shifts power away from the international system of human rights and onto nation-states and agendas such as national security, trade, and industrial policy. On the other hand, within each nation state, there is a move of power away from individuals and collectives towards national needs. On the tech front, corporate attention moves away from consumers and onto business-to-business services (energy, chips, data processing). As a result of these forces, the bottom-up grassroots consumer model from which civil society emerged in the US is losing relevance for the tech companies. Meanwhile, for governments, attention moves towards a securitization mindset. In the US, the government sees the international law (upon which human rights is constructed) as friction to its geopolitical agenda abroad, and presents it as weakening (wokeness) internally.

US Goals:
- Consolidate decision-making in the Executive branch. Reduce friction created by social movements and civil society in order to rapidly reorganize the US economy and global standing from what is presented as its potential demise.

Key expressions and examples:
- Facebook ends fact-checking.[48]

- Big Tech cuts jobs and Diversity Inclusion Equity (DEI) programs taking a hit.[49]

- USAID funding cuts target human rights and civil society.[50]

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48. David Gilbert, "Meta's Fact-Checking Partners Say They Were 'Blindsided' by Decision to Axe Them," Wired, accessed May 22, 2025, https://www.wired.com/story/metas-fact-checking-partners-blindsided/.

49. Dominic-Madori Davis, "Here Are All the Tech Companies Rolling Back DEI or Still Committed to It — so Far," *TechCrunch* (blog), April 17, 2025, https://techcrunch.com/2025/04/17/here-are-all-the-tech-companies-rolling-back-dei-or-still-committed-to-it-so-far/; Cody Corrall Park Alyssa Stringer, Kate, "A Comprehensive List of 2025 Tech Layoffs," *TechCrunch* (blog), May 21, 2025, https://techcrunch.com/2025/05/21/tech-layoffs-2025-list/.

50. Justin Sandefur and Charles Kenny, "USAID Cuts: New Estimates at the Country Level," *Center For Global Development* (blog), March 26, 2025, https://www.cgdev.org/blog/usaid-cuts-new-estimates-country-level.

• Draft bill might enable executive to remove nonprofit status of organizations considered to support terrorism.[51] An interviewee approached by the author who is working with a foundation in Washington DC considers that, although it is unlikely to come into Law, it sets a tone and will undoubtedly have chilling effects.

Indirect Effects:
• Less government and corporate funding for the digital rights agenda.

• Big Tech has less reasons to care about human rights agenda and abuses.

• More tension with local tech companies, unions, and local political parties as local companies emerge as national champions for digital sovereignty.

EFFECTS ON TRENDS OUTLINED IN REPORT:

1. **CONVERGENCE WITH HUMAN RIGHTS CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS: ACCELERATING**
   • Lack of funding triggers competition across sectors and drives collaboration.[52]

2. **SHIFTS IN FUNDER AGENDA AND CHALLENGES TO ACCESS TO FUNDING: ACCELERATING**
   • USAID cuts (see DeepDive below).

   • The US House passed a draft law placing taxes on income from university endowment investments to up to 21%, and up to 10% on investments from foundations.[53]

   • Draft legislation might allow the President to revoke nonprofit status of organizations considered to be supportive of terrorism, leading funders to be more conservative in what topics they fund and who they engage with.[54]

   • US targeting university research funding, with partnership reverberations for CSOs.

   • Previous US-China complementarity in funding (US: education, healthcare. China: roads, railways). Now: US = Nothing. China = "small is beautiful".[55]

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51. Council of Nonprofits, "Nonprofits Under Threat: What's in the House Tax Bill and How You Can Help | National Council of Nonprofits," May 12, 2025, https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/articles/nonprofits-under-threat-whats-house-tax-bill-and-how-you-can-help.

52. Chris Cardona, "The Prevalence of Partnerships in Top Proposals from 100&Change," March 10, 2025, https://www.macfound.org/press/perspectives/the-prevalence-of-partnerships-in-top-proposals-from-100-change.

53. Paul Clolery, "House Passes Budget Bill That Inflicts Pain On Charities," *The NonProfit Times* (blog), May 22, 2025, https://thenonprofittimes.com/npt_articles/house-passes-budget-bill-that-inflicts-pain-on-charities/.

54. Council of Nonprofits, "Nonprofits Under Threat: What's in the House Tax Bill and How You Can Help | National Council of Nonprofits," May 12, 2025, https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/articles/nonprofits-under-threat-whats-house-tax-bill-and-how-you-can-help.

55. Yinka Adegoke, "China Won't 'Replace' USAID in Africa," March 3, 2025, https://www.semafor.com/article/03/03/2025/china-wont-replace-usaid-in-africa. See also, interactive map of Chinese investments/Aid https://china.aiddata.org.

- Chinese deployment of government supported NGOs at the UN might damage credibility of civil society at large and further limit access/relevance of the sector.[56]

3. **NEW CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR TECH-DEPENDENT ACTIVISM:** <mark>UNCERTAIN</mark>
   - **National champions vs decentralization:** Decentralized apps and open protocols garner attention as fear of US weaponization of technology increases. Meanwhile, national champions lobby to get funding and recreate centralized replacements for US tech.[57]

   - **Privacy win:** US court ruled against NSO group and awarded $170 million USD in damages to Whatsapp.[58]

DEEPDIVE INTERSECTION: USAID FUNDING CUTS VISUALIZED

Understanding the impact of USAID funding cuts is complex because of the scale of the figures, the swiftness of the decision, and the judicial activity which resulted in partial stalls to the cuts. The data regarding USAID included in the graphs is based on a leaked document analyzed by the Center for Global Development, a nonprofit based out of Washington DC that has received funding from Gates Foundation, Hewlett Foundation and the European Union, among others.[59] The interactive graph helps understand the scale of the cuts and the potential reverberations it will have across the human rights ecosystem.

Whereas some major USAID healthcare programs, which constitute the majority of USAID funding, were mostly preserved,[60] programs like Civil Society were almost fully cut, representing over $300 million USD (or $0,3 billion USD in cuts for the ecosystem). Although these figures are small when compared to the annual expenditure of a country like Brazil ($397 billion USD), the country cuts significantly impacted countries like Uganda, which saw cuts of $307 million USD (or $0,37 billion USD) and its government manages a yearly expenditure of $20 billion USD). Furthermore, these figures are high when we compare them to the broader funding ecosystem of private foundations. The USAID Civil Society program alone is the equivalent to around half of all Ford Foundation expenditures for 2023, and around twice of all Open Society Foundations (OSF) funding for the same period. Click on the graph to explore bubble plots and bar graphs to get a better sense of how big USAID cuts were, and how they compare to government expenditures, corporate revenues and more.

56. Tasmin Lee-Smith and Jelena Cosic, "At the U.N., China Is Deploying a Growing Army of Puppet Organizations to Monitor and Intimidate Human Rights Activists - ICIJ," April 28, 2025, https://www.icij.org/investigations/china-targets/united-nations-ngo-gongo-intimidate-human-rights/.

57. Paris Marx, "Can Europe End Its Dependence on US Tech? W/ Aline Blankertz - Tech Won't Save Us," Tech Won't Save Us, April 10, 2025, https://techwontsave.us/episode/271_can_europe_end_its_dependence_on_us_tech_w_aline_blankertz.html.

58. Maggie Miller, "Israeli Spyware Giant NSO Group Ordered to Pay Nearly $170M to WhatsApp for Hacking Accounts," POLITICO, May 6, 2025, https://www.politico.com/news/2025/05/06/nso-group-pegasus-whatsapp-hack-170-million-damages-00332155.

59. Sandefur and Kenny, "USAID Cuts." https://www.cgdev.org/blog/usaid-cuts-new-estimates-country-level.

60. For example, the HIV/AIDS program which represented $5,7 billion USD saw $4,3 billion USD preserved and a cut of $1 billion USD.

Figure 6. Comparing USAID cuts to the budget of major foundations.
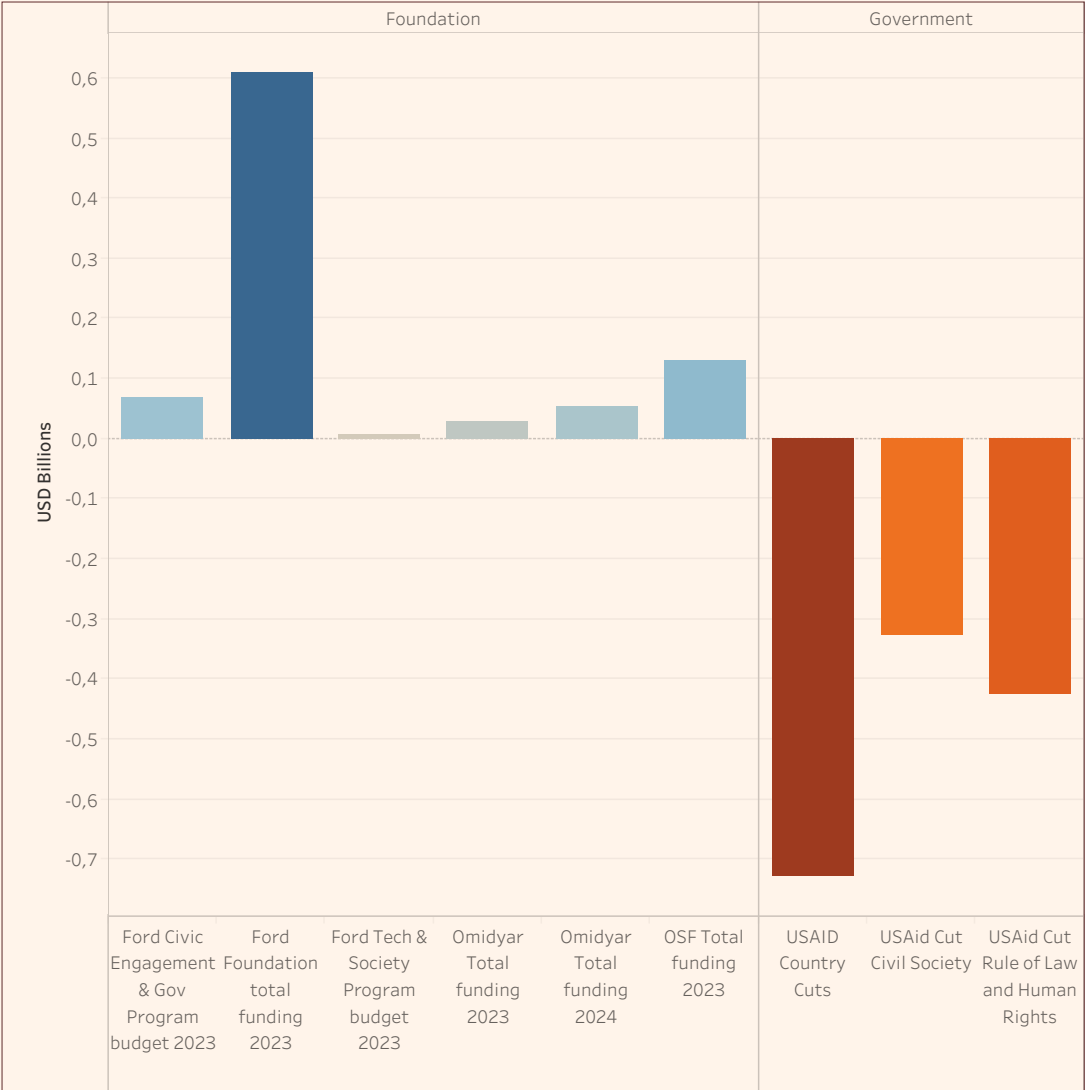
Note: Developed by the author. Click on the image to access an interactive version. "USAID country cuts" includes the aggregate cuts for the DRN home countries. Click on the graph to see cuts for specific countries, total cuts, as well as cuts affecting other programs.

Synthesis of Trump effect on activism trends: a force pushing civil society organizations towards the bottom right. More convergence with the broader human rights field (out of a lack of resources, but also because the overlaps become more evident), and more local reach as the Trump administration seeks to move debates to bilateral arenas.

*Fig. 7: An exploration of the breadth of activism in terms of geography and agenda.*
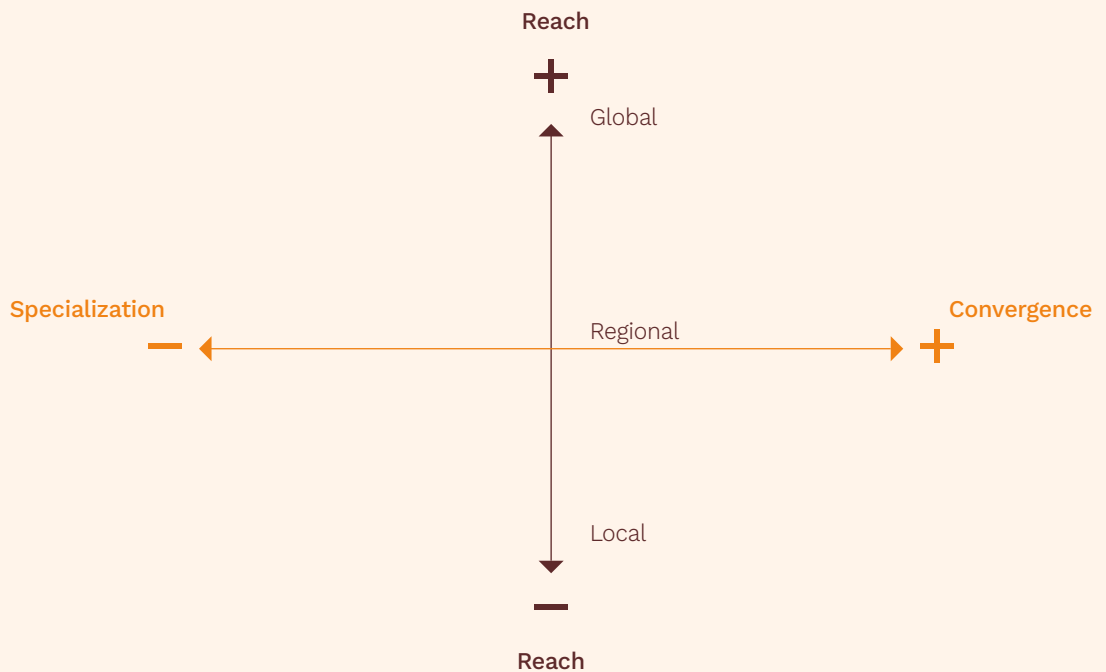
KEY THREADS FOR DISCUSSION: STRUCTURAL DISPLACEMENT
If the civil society model is being pressured by a Business-to-Business dynamic, is there an opportunity to strengthen focus on corporate social responsibility?

Embrace new role as overseer of partnerships	
Pros	Cons[61]
A mechanism to re-introduce human and digital rights into new dynamics through UN Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights.	Lack of expertise and risk of being used for brand-washing.
Access to new sources of funding.	Might damage reputation of organizations and the broader field.
Might enable access to spaces and discussions where CSOs are currently not present, and increase ability to understand new challenges (e.g. water/energy consumption of datacenters).	Might legitimize a transition from human rights guiding technological development to the perception that human rights are mere guardrails for the private sector to avoid public relations blunders.

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61. OHCHR, "Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework" (United Nations, June 16, 2011).

VI.
CONCLUSION
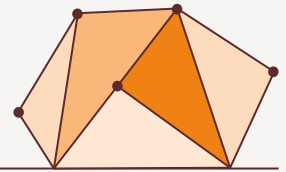
The Trump administration represents a disruptive force for the digital rights ecosystem. It accelerates most of the trends identified in the **Scanning the Horizon report**, and will undoubtedly reshape the landscape of civil society organizations. This brief sheds light on the scale of the disruptions to the funding (e.g. USAID cuts to Uganda being twice the size of the full basket of grants assigned by OSF in 2023), the new actors that are emerging (e.g. Gulf countries, chipmakers, energy companies), as well as the new framings and agendas (national security, sovereignty, trade, industrial policy). Together, they express the new topography within which the debates regarding the future of technology are taking place: one where power is increasingly consolidated, authoritarianism is festering and notes of fascism emerge, while the international system faces existential threats.

The challenges are too large for any single organization to tackle on its own. The DRN is sharing this brief to open strategic discussions towards the construction of new alternatives and approaches to collaboration and resilience, since coming together is an opportunity to develop a unified voice capable of shaping global or regional agendas. As we enter the eye of a storm that is likely going to outlast many organizations in the field, as well as the Trump administration itself, it is important to embrace, explore, and communicate the meaning of resilience for the local and global communities that are part of this ecosystem.

The crisis is happening now, what comes next depends on how we wade through it: inviting other actors to the table, taking a page from the environmental movement and guiding the ecosystem through the adoption of mitigation and adaptation strategies on one side, while also looking for new opportunities for impact, and new allies. The invitation is open: coming together and developing an agenda and tone that energizes the next generation of activists into creating a world worth fighting for.

digitalresilience.network