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REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In June 2024, nearly 100 experts, including scholars, policymakers, advocates, organizers, and technologists, convened in Mexico City to discuss the political economy of AI and digital technologies. The conference aimed to explore how AI, data, and digital technologies impact and are impacted by global and national economies and societies in the context of global North and South power dynamics. The conference was held because the Global Fund for a New Economy (GFNE) identified a gap in collaboration between AI, digital technologies, and new economy efforts. We recognized the need for proactive strategies to build a "new economy" that is pro-democracy, sustainable, inclusive, and addresses rapidly shifting technologies. Particular attention was paid to global dynamics, where there are looming concerns about equitable value distribution from the forecasted industrial transformation and where historically marginalized populations have long borne the brunt of systems' failures. In coming together across different sectors, issue area expertise, and approaches, our goal was to spark discussions, build connections, and generate ideas that can lead to ongoing learning and cross-sector collaboration.

To frame the conversations, the conference organizers shared the framework of now Nobel-prize-winning economists Daron Acemoglu and Simon Johnson in their book *Power and Progress* that the trajectory of all technological development is shaped by social values and choices. These choices are made and constrained by dominant narratives that define available options, regulatory and policy regimes that shape technology and its benefits, and societal power relations. With this framework in mind, discussions centered on three major themes: 1) Market Concentration Across the Technology Stack and Value Chain, 2) AI & Digital Technologies' Labor Market Impact, and 3) Public Sector Infrastructure, Data & Governance. We explored the following questions:

»   How are AI and digital technologies shaping global and national economies and societies, including work?

»   What narratives and frameworks best support the development of AI and digital technologies that benefit people and society?

>> How can we build countervailing power (organized collective action by workers and communities) to ensure democratic control and governance, fair distribution of productivity gains, and socially responsible uses of AI and digital technologies?

>> From a Global Majority perspective, what principles should guide AI strategies and policy advocacy agenda?

The conversations highlighted the need for new economic policy models and strategies to address inequalities exacerbated by the dominance of increasingly large and powerful technology firms (also referred to as Big Tech in this report) and the uneven distribution of technological advancements and economic gains. They also highlighted challenges and opportunities to build more just and democratic technological futures, emphasizing collective rights, democratic governance, and global equity, and identified potential interventions. This report summarizes the panel discussions and conversations, identifying key themes and interventions. It does not seek to represent the views of conference organizers, panelists, or participants.

Key Themes and Takeaways

The themes and takeaways outlined below aim to offer differing perspectives and ideas and are a combination of summaries, provocations, and questions that emerged during the panel discussions, working groups, and conversations. For conference organizers, the arguments by Daron Acemoglu and Simon Johnson in their recent history of technology, *Power and Progress*, offer a compelling summary of where we are and what is needed:

> *"a new, more inclusive vision of technology can emerge only if the basis of social power changes. This requires… the rise of counterarguments and organizations that can stand up to conventional wisdom. Confronting the prevailing vision and wresting the direction of technology away from the control of a narrow elite may be even more difficult today… But it is no less essential."*

Framing the Political Economy of AI & Digital Technologies

>> This conversation emphasized the need to popularize a power analysis around AI and digital technologies that names concerns with concentrated economic power in the hands of few unaccountable large private actors. It also discussed shifting focus towards reclaiming democratic control over the future trajectory of these consequential technologies so that they serve public interests rather than corporate monopolies.

›› Due to extractive economic models and inequities in the global economic system, participants from the Global South voiced concerns about being excluded from shaping the AI research and development trajectory in any meaningful way. Some countries broadly lack the resources, the political space, or have a weak political will to build domestic ecosystems, often relying on partnerships with increasingly powerful global technology companies for critical technological advancement.

›› The conversation surfaced that this is by no means true only for the Global South— even in the Global North, it is these handful of corporate actors that dominate access to resources and influence the policy debate to the exclusion of other interests. Rather than viewing regulation as necessarily hindering innovation in the Global South (a common sentiment), strong regulation aimed at combating concentrated power in these companies would move us towards a more equitable global AI and digital technology ecosystem.

›› Regulation, while necessary, is insufficient on its own to address the current concentration of power in the digital domain. The panel highlighted the critical need for robust digital industrial policies that include clear conditionalities to ensure outcomes aligned with the public interest and positive environmental impact. Such policies must aim to build alternative digital infrastructures that challenge the dominance of large corporate monopolies. Achieving this vision requires strong public leadership and significant investment. However, it also depends on fostering a dynamic and accountable local industrial ecosystem and actively engaging workers and communities. New alliances should be forged amongst non aligned countries to develop, scale, and maintain independent digital infrastructures and ecosystems.

AI, Digital Technologies & Global Power Dynamics

›› This session underscored the neoliberal consensus behind AI and digital technologies, which entrenches colonial practices of extraction and exploitation.

›› Experts highlighted the disconnect between the digital economy and social production, where marginalized communities, particularly in the Global South, bear the brunt of data commodification.

›› Throughout these conversations, panelists and participants spoke to the need for alternative economic paradigms that focus on public interest, collective autonomy, and stronger democratic governance models that empower citizens and workers, ensuring equitable benefits from technological advancements

Market Concentration Across the Technology Stack and Value Chain

» This discussion delved into the problem of concentrated power in the tech industry, describing it as a "democracy problem."

» Specifically, the increasing power of Big Tech to shape policy emerged as a key concern, with companies using lobbying, monetary incentives, and narrative control tactics to resist or undermine regulations that could limit their power and change their monopolistic business models. The fact that current competition laws and/or their implementation are often inadequate to address these challenges was underpinned.

» Therefore, there was broad agreement that there is a need to limit corporate lobbying and curb the power of global technology companies and their political influence by regulating monopolies, addressing the role of global trade agreements, and creating fairer agreements that also promote innovation in both the Global South and North.

AI & Digital Technologies' Labor Market Impact

» This conversation examined how AI and digital technologies are transforming labor markets, exacerbating inequalities, and contributing to the precarity of workers, particularly in the Global South. AI and digital technologies are disrupting labor markets, and a perspective was shared that this is affecting low- and medium-skill jobs in the Global South more negatively than in the Global North.

» Gig work and algorithmic management were discussed as harmful to workers' rights, with a particular focus on how labor practices exploit vulnerable populations who face particularly precarious conditions due to algorithmic management, surveillance, and often the lack of adequate social protections.

» Panelists and participants also recognized some positive impacts of digital technologies on labor market and conditions, including formalizing informal work and empowering workers in workplaces.

» There was consensus around the urgent need to organize workers, build countervailing power, and shift the narrative on AI and digital technologies to focus on social justice and workers' rights. It was emphasized that strategies to organize workers must go beyond tackling the harms of the current systems to labor acting as a transformative force capable of reshaping (digital) economic frameworks and prioritizing the public interest and common good.

Public Sector Infrastructure, Data & Governance

›› These discussions explored the potential of alternative forms of building and financing digital infrastructure outside of the Big Tech-dominated AI and digital technologies AI stack, including proposals that are often referred to as "digital public infrastructures" or "public digital infrastructures." Globally, there are fairly heterogeneous projects under this umbrella, but one prominent theme was that there is a need for these initiatives to foreground both independent governance and democratic control so that they can be held accountable to the broader public interest (rather than, for example, simply replicating Big Tech practices in homegrown avatars or national champions, or simply being captured by Big Tech itself). One model put forward was for digital public goods to be open-source and non-exclusive as a way to foster a more equitable digital future, including leveraging innovation, production, and value creation–alongside economic gains– in both the Global South and North.

›› Panelists discussed that developing citizen-centric digital public infrastructures that are accountable and independent require a comprehensive approach combining regulation, ethical digital standards, and strategic public investment. Regulation should prioritize principles such as interoperability, data sovereignty, open standards, and public value creation. Additionally, public procurement can play a transformative role by driving demand and incentivizing the participation of local developers and indigenous industries. Procurement policies should prioritize locally developed digital public services that adhere to local rules and regulations, ensuring investments support local innovation. This approach can scale interoperable solutions, reduce dependence on dominant foreign players, and strengthen public sector capabilities and skills. Digital Public Infrastructures (DPIs) should encompass federated, open cloud infrastructures, public compute options, and systems for managing critical data flows, such as data commons. They must also establish global benchmarks in privacy, digital payment systems, privacy-enhancing digital IDs, interoperability, and innovation. These infrastructures serve as the critical backbone of modern society, supporting essential services like healthcare, education, mobility and taxation. As such, they must be governed and managed as digital public goods, ensuring equitable access and accountability while fostering trust and sustainability.

›› The conversation also acknowledged the risks of mass surveillance and authoritarianism inherent in DPIs depending on the national political context including when they are state-run or controlled. Panel conversation included a call for a decolonial, feminist, and community-driven approach to AI and digital technology and the economic model that underpins them.

EMERGING INTERVENTIONS

As one of the speakers mentioned, we have a collective action problem. The expansion of issues that intersect with digital technologies and AI are expanding the parameters of the conversation—from environmental consequences to the entrenchment of racist and discriminatory behaviors to impacts on public services. At the same time, the harms are so disparate that it is hard to come together with a single voice or set of demands. So, how do we frame the conversation going forward in ways that open up space for a different economic model? What policies, alliances, narratives, and national and global institutions are needed? There is much to be done, but here are some key interventions that emerged during the conference:

» Research to better understand the macro-economic impact of AI globally on labor, scientific, and technical domains.

» Developing new narratives to disrupt techno-determinism and replace it with a public interest agenda for digital infrastructures and AI.

» Developing and sharing analyses of AI and digital technologies across different sectors and geographies, a public interest agenda, and a toolkit of policy, regulatory, and governance models relevant to national contexts.

» Fostering and supporting efforts and coalitions of non-aligned countries and movements working to reclaim digital sovereignty and achieve strategic autonomy through a public interest digital industrial policy in the face of growing global dependencies on dominant tech powers. These coalitions can play a pivotal role in developing independent, public-interest digital infrastructures and policies designed to serve people and the planet. Such efforts should focus on creating equitable and sustainable digital ecosystems that respect local values, prioritize data sovereignty, and address critical challenges such as privacy, accessibility, workers rights, and environmental impact.

» Mapping, research, and coordination on critical digital infrastructures (including AI, data centers, chips, compute, cloud etc) AI and data center labor supply chain.

» Global, regional, and national infrastructure to build awareness and support coordination on digital trade.

» Building and wielding countervailing power by organizing workers and communities to help shape policies and regulations.

» Maximizing opportunities to shape the agenda of national governments, multilateral bodies and agreements.

» Developing analysis of and strategies to address the energy and natural resource uses of digital infrastructures, AI and data centers.

» Infrastructure and strategies for transnational labor solidarity, including global and regional training and capacity-building hubs.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AI & DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES: OPENING REMARKS

This opening conference session offered diverse perspectives, frameworks, challenges, opportunities, and provocations from speakers Brian Kettenring, Raymundo Campos, Andrea Dehlendorf, Amr Adly, and Marsha K. Caddle to ground conference conversations on the political economy of AI and digital technologies.

» **Brian Kettenring, co-president of the Global Fund for a New Economy (GFNE),** introduced GFNE's mission, emphasizing the need to cultivate resources and infrastructure to build a more inclusive and democratic political economy. He highlighted the new fund's focus on AI and digital technologies as one of the key policy areas, discussed why a political economy lens is critical to collectively build towards more democratic and inclusive digital technologies, and noted the importance of bringing together global scholars, advocates, and policymakers in this effort.

» **Raymundo Campos-Vazquez, a Professor at El Colegio de Mexico**, welcomed participants to Mexico City and spoke to what he called the three core challenges facing humanity in this moment: climate change, demographic shifts, and developments in AI and digital technologies and their implications. He offered examples and insights into the relevance of these conversations for Mexico.

» **Amr Adly from the American University in Cairo** summarized the preceding meeting of political economists, which focused on developing a post-neoliberal paradigm. The political economy of AI and digital technology conference was purposefully held at this time and place to include academics and political economists and build bridges across these fields.

» **Andrea Dehlendorf, the conference organizer**, outlined the intention of the meeting to foster collaboration across sectors, encouraging a deep dive into how AI and digital technologies can serve the public good, and the goal of building shared analyses and visions for future actions. She underscored the importance of bringing together diverse stakeholders, from scholars seeding the ideas to campaigners building

countervailing power to advocates working on regulatory and policy change to government officials, to foster conversation and collaboration across sectors and areas of issue expertise to do this collectively.

» And finally, **Marsha K. Caddle, a Barbadian politician and member of the Ministry of Industry, Innovation, Science and Technology** framed the challenges and contradictions for Global South countries, especially small island countries, in the anticipated industrial transformation brought about by technological and AI developments. She highlighted that historical industrialization cycles have come about on the back of global inequities and the risk that developments in the digital economy could further entrench these trends. Therefore, she stressed the need for equitable participation of Global South countries in technological and AI advancements, including innovation, production, value creation, and economic gain.

AI, DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, AND GLOBAL POWER DYNAMICS

Setting the context for the conference, Anita Gurumurthy, Amba Kak, and Francesca Bria each offered a provocation on the existing political economy of AI and digital technologies, how to combat harms to individuals, workers, communities, and democracies - and what we might need to consider when thinking about new economic paradigms. Panelists explored the concentration of power in AI, data, and digital technologies, with emerging themes outlined below. Specifically, they explored:

» How the deployment of AI and digital technologies are playing out globally and impacting economic and public sectors, with a focus on Global South and North dynamics;

» Understanding the infrastructural, data, talent, and capital dimensions of the AI stack;

» Alternative modes of innovation, digital industrial policy, and governance of AI/digital technologies for the public interest and shared prosperity.

Emerging Themes

The panelists and ensuing discussions looked at how a neoliberal consensus underpins the AI and digital economic model, exacerbating existing practices of extractivism and exploitation of people and the environment. It was put forward that as a result, data—and therefore its value—are considered inherently private rather than as a global commons, global public good, or public utility. At the same time, digital discourse is disconnected from the process of social production, from the producers, workers, and people who wittingly or unwittingly supply their data. The casualties of this are disproportionately people at the margins, especially in the Global South. There was broad agreement that we need to tackle the root causes of these inequities by looking at who holds power, how we disrupt it, and what alternatives look like. Panelists argued that building a new (digital) economic paradigm will require going beyond pushing for better regulatory frameworks and enforcement, both of which are necessary but insufficient. According to Anita

Gurumurthy, there are four critical points about the existing digital economic model to pay attention to when considering a shift toward new paradigms which are:

>> Human indignity is engrained in the economic model and further entrenches a reliance on extraction and exploitation, but with the added disconnect of the labor market from value creation;

>> The digital economy is about consumption and distribution, not production and value creation (first-mover monopolies like Amazon and Ali Baba have perfected this approach)

>> The liberal concept of digital freedom focuses on individual rights, divorcing public rights from concepts of digital rights and freedoms. The result is that the privileged few get consumer and user rights.

>> The takeover of public and policy space by Big Tech, globally.

Amba Kak focused on the concentration of power as a starting point that "will give us the courage, the resilience, and the imagination to think of what an alternative might look like." For Kak, the current trajectory of development in AI represents continuity with developments in digital technologies and not a rupture. For Kak, the trajectory demonstrates how hard it is to influence things once power is consolidated. In the last decade, we have confronted and unraveled tech power *after* the fact, with some but rare success cases. Attempts at challenging tech power often face institutional and political resistance, including legal battles that tend to favor inadequate regulatory mandates, especially when structural remedies are put forward. The last ten years of developments in AI and digital technologies, coupled with the growth of monopolies in the industry, demonstrate that this is part of a longer story of the concentration of power. For Kak, this might offer a fair warning that the current AI business model is headed towards further consolidating power in the hands of global technology companies, and it matters because:

>> Economic power translates into political power, including on a regulatory level.

>> AI's current usage tells us what it will be used for in the future: surveillance-based AI systems exacerbate power asymmetries between workers and employers, citizens and the State, and between the Global South and North.

>> We need to think about the impact of AI development on future generations, including the inequity of land bought for data centers and the use of water and energy amidst a growing global climate crisis.

Complementing Amba Kak's' view, Francesca Bria emphasized the need to build new forms of political and multidisciplinary alliances, alongside progressive rules, governance models, and development frameworks that protect and empower workers while ultimately empowering citizens. She posed critical questions: How can we reimagine the institutions and infrastructures required to achieve collective autonomy in the digital age? What lessons can we draw from past experiments, and where do political opportunities lie today?

Bria highlighted examples such as her work as Adviser of Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, who is exploring bold public policies to rein in Big Tech, demonstrating how governments can take proactive steps to address power imbalances. She also suggested that the "tech war" between China and the United States might create openings for new political alliances among other ""on allied" regions, emphasizing the potential for a multipolar digital order. While acknowledging their imperfections, Bria pointed to the EU's regulatory frameworks—such as the DSA, DMA, and GDPR—as foundational starting points for deeper reforms.

She outlined three immediate priorities for action:

» **Big Tech Taxation**: Developing policies to ensure companies pay taxes where they extract value, critical raw materials, labor, and data while making super-profits. Bria challenged policymakers to rethink global tax regimes to close loopholes and promote fairness.

» **Progressive Digital Industrial Policy**: Advancing digital industrial policies with strong conditionalities. These should include:

 » Creating decolonial supply chains to eliminate reliance on armed conflict for raw materials, vital to tech and green transitions.

 » Antimonopoly approaches to curb infrastructural power and platforms dominance: For instance regulating the cloud by decoupling key elements of computing infrastructure and establishing public utilities to ensure sovereignty.

 » Reforming public procurement processes, licensing frameworks, and governance of public interest data and technologies to prioritize local control, data sovereignty, and accountability.

» Develop Public-Interest Technology: Designing a program for public-interest technology under democratic control. This includes establishing digital commons and decentralized public infrastructures governed in the public interest. The independent governance model could be inspired by the BBC's original vision of public service media. We need next-generation public digital infrastructures that serve public needs, empower workers and communities.

Bria stressed that the path forward requires clarity on how to operationalize these ideas. This involves forging alliances, building institutions, crafting compelling narratives, and shaping policy agendas to advance public and collective rights. It also requires rethinking global governance regimes to secure democratic control and ownership of data and critical digital infrastructures that underpin essential services of society and have a direct impact on democracy and the welfare state, while addressing environmental challenges within a decolonial economic paradigm.

She concluded by urging policymakers and advocates to broaden our social imagination and co-create an autonomous path for our digital future that goes beyond Big Tech and Big State, where technology serves people and the planet, rather than perpetuating inequalities and dependencies. This digital sovereignty and digital independence vision necessitates bold leadership and a collective commitment and investment.

MARKET CONCENTRATION & INDUSTRIAL POLICY

The panel and discussions on market concentration and industrial policy delved into the problem of concentrated power in the tech industry, alongside the increasing power of Big Tech to shape and influence policymaking in their favor, describing these as fundamental threats to democracy. Broadly, conversations covered:

» Why concentrated power is a "democracy problem": the landscape of corporate lobbying in technology policy (and beyond).

» The promise and limits of the conventional competition toolkit to addressing concentrated power globally.

» Understanding the "digital trade" playbook as an instrument of concentrated corporate power and its application in the AI/ tech domain.

Across all contributions, it was clear that we are consistently on the back foot with regulation, including trade agreements, and scrambling to reduce the worst harms caused by Big Tech's business model and products *after* the fact. We need to ensure that authorities use the legislation and regulation to their full potential, and are also proactive and visionary. Below are a few key themes that emerged across panel contributions and ensuing discussions.

The EU single market versus the impact on communities and democracies: Discussions covered how the EU is **the** leading regulatory body for digital technologies but is, first and foremost, a single market that shapes regulation and enforcement. A priority at an EU regulatory level is, therefore, not protecting communities or democracies but facilitating free trade between countries. This is key when considering 1) what we do as a multi-disciplinary set of actors and 2) the limits of relying on regulation and enforcement within the market framework. It was pointed out that lobbying and political power to influence regulation and limit enforcement have often acted as fortifications to grow Big Tech's toxic business model and for abusive practices to go unchallenged, including by regulators. Because of the market lens, competition and other enforcement authorities (including outside the EU) have focused on the narrow set of harms from market power to consumers, for example, the consumer welfare standard, and not looked at the

detrimental harms of the concentration of power on broader society, democracy, and the information ecosystem.

The corporate capture of digital policymaking: A recurring theme across multiple panels was how the use of market power to gain political power and then shape policy is core to how Big Tech companies have become so influential over the last decade and that we are now seeing AI follow a similar trajectory. We need to learn the lessons from how Google, Meta, and Amazon have consistently managed to influence the EU and water down or stop altogether regulations that would challenge their abusive conduct in the market or their surveillance practices. In response to regulations such as the Digital Markets Act (DMA) and GDPR, Big Tech lobbying and other tactics ensure that enforcement is limited, timid, and largely ineffective, and the behavior of the companies remains essentially unchanged while regulators fail to act. This is despite evidence of substantial harms, including such scandals as Cambridge Analytica or well-documented security and privacy risks of surveillance-based advertising. A potent example mentioned was attempts to include the phasing out of surveillance advertising–the business model that powers Google and Facebook–in the Digital Services Act (DSA). Big Tech's response was stifling but nothing new and taken from the playbook of Big Tobacco, Oil, or Pharma: aggressive lobbying in relevant capital cities, reports using murky data detailing the harms, spinning media narratives, and setting up front and fake companies to create the illusion of hundreds of companies saying the same thing, creating outsized pressure. The corporate, political, and lobbying power of Big Tech companies is not only a hindrance to tackling the harm they cause, but it is also inherently bad for democracy as those with the most money dictate policy.

Big Tech companies use framing and narrative building: It was discussed how alongside their ability to influence policy-making and enforcement, Big Tech companies and their subsidiaries shape the public and policy narrative to benefit them. Core to this strategy is shaping common sense through framing regulation and enforcement as stifling innovation. The latter is framed as inherently good without asking what the innovation is for or whom it serves. It was pointed out that false dichotomies of regulation versus innovation are not useful, especially because regulation *could* steer innovation toward ensuring technology is used to help stop climate change or improve people's health. It was pointed out that the success of Big Tech's narrative-building is apparent as they successfully present themselves as innovators or national champions in need of protection, especially with the emergence of AI. Other examples emerged of narratives being espoused or strengthened by Big Tech companies play into geopolitical fears, including that "if you regulate, China wins," and that Europe needs to be concerned about its competitiveness, and because regulation stifles competition, it is detrimental to the economy. Thus, narratives around sovereignty, regulation, and industrial policy end up being captured by

the exact actors they are meant to be challenging. Conversations emphasized the need to take narrative-building seriously as part of the toolbox taking on the power and undue influence of Big Tech.

Limitations of regulatory approaches: Discussions examined how a focus on regulation alone, currently the dominant approach of civil society and philanthropy, is limited. There have undoubtedly been wins from a regulatory perspective, and there has been a positive movement, for example, in the enforcement of antitrust laws in the USA. However, with the advent of AI "innovation" and hype, it appears we are moving backward in policy-making circles and the public narrative of the harms caused by Big Tech companies. It was pointed out that the results of using regulation to take on Big Tech have done little to challenge the structural power of these companies. The Big Tech playbook is not new. We could learn from failures to tackle Big Oil, Big Tobacco, and Big Pharma. With AI, companies are repeating many of the same patterns, adapting to avoid new regulations or enforcement. An excellent example is that companies are no longer acquiring start-ups but "partnering" with them due to growing crackdowns on monopolies. Similarly, regulators, policymakers, and enforcement authorities repeat many of the same mistakes, as are the actors attempting to forge a different role for technology and AI in society, the economy, and democracy.

Global trade agreements and their relationship to Big Tech: Corporate-driven global digital trade agreements significantly limit sovereign nations and supranational bodies from enacting regulations limiting the power, reach, and monopolistic business model of Big Tech. In other words, Big Tech is using digital trade rules to advance and enshrine a neoliberal agenda, impeding regulation, stifling local innovation, and prioritizing the interest of companies over the public interest. There are positive developments, such as the USA under Biden shifting away from consumer to worker-centric trade policy and making attempts to reassert democratic governance in trade agreements–wins off the back of campaigning using insider and outsider strategies. There are also examples of movement in the opposite direction with, for example, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement adopting some of the most aggressive US digital trade rules prioritizing tech companies. The EU is shifting its once cautious approach to digital trade in response to tech lobbying. Given the significant role of trade agreements and their wide-ranging impacts, anyone working on a new digital economic model must be aware of the opportunities and limitations.

Global South and North dynamics: It was pointed out that the discourse around market concentration is unhelpful in many Global South countries as conversations on regulation, innovation, and capacity are not cognisant enough of their experiences and realities. For example, panelists discussed that the dichotomies are often drawn between the state and corporations and between public and private need more context (state = good, corporation = bad; public = good, private = bad), as lobbying to enact specific trade agreements with Global South countries often comes from the EU or powerful governments in Europe or North America–not Big Tech companies. Similarly, it was posited that Global South countries are more likely to rely on public-private partnerships to acquire the necessary capital and access to technology and technological developments than countries in the Global North, meaning that market concentration is harder to challenge there need to be serious alternatives to where the investment comes from.

Addressing concentrated power –our competition policy toolkit: Finally, while many discussions focused on the barriers, contributors offered a snapshot of available tools to address concentrated power. These included:

1. Merger control: The ability of competition authorities to stop dominant companies from acquiring rivals or promising start-ups, a powerful tool that does not stop existing concentration in the economy but prevents it from worsening.

2. Investigating anti-competitive behavior: Competition authorities investigate a dominant company for using its market power to abuse consumers or exploit businesses that rely on it and can then impose remedies.

3. Digital competition regulation: A relatively new approach in which instead of the authorities having to prove wrongful behavior, they ban it outright. This includes new legislation, such as the DMA in the EU and similar legislation in other countries. In theory, this might stop harms as they emerge, including with AI, but it's hard to judge the impact after just a few months.

There was broad agreement in the room on the need to limit corporate lobbying and curb the power of global technology companies and their political influence by regulating monopolies, addressing the role of global trade agreements, and creating fairer agreements that promote innovation in both the Global South and North. Discussions ended with a call for thinking on a new (digital) economy to earnestly plot out what is needed and possible on a global scale to ensure an equitable, democratic technological transformation.

AI & DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES' LABOR MARKET IMPACT

Contributions and conversations focused on how AI and digital technologies and the business model and practices of Big Tech companies are both negatively and positively impacting the labor market and relationships between employers and employees, as well as global supply chains. The danger of current trajectories entrenching inequities in terms of access to good jobs, working conditions, and who bears the brunt of environmental and economic extractivism was also discussed. Finally, we delved into what might be required for AI and digital technologies to benefit workers, communities, and economies more equitably. In short, conversations covered:

» How digital technologies and AI are influencing the world of work and how this is evolving and impacting differently in the Global South and North

» The labor supply chain powering the digital economy

» The potential power of labor to be a driving force shifting the economic and social frameworks to a more public interest, common good approach.

» Strategies to contest for the future of work and equitable distribution of economic gains

Nuance in discourse about employment, workers' rights, and the impacts of AI and digital technologies: There was a lot of enthusiasm for calls to move away from binary narratives of 'AI and digital technologies are good or bad' or that AI is replacing jobs toward narratives that acknowledge the nuance and complexity of how developments in AI and digital technologies are impacting sectors, geographies, peoples, communities and economies differently, including different impacts across the tech stack supply chain. It was argued that this would allow us to design a clearer and better-informed path to establishing guardrails that address specific harms at all levels. There was consensus that pathways forward must include provisions for workers to have a share of the productivity gains they create. One dynamic that was mentioned that needs to be better understood is the inequities in good jobs and value creation in the Global South and North.

Gig work, algorithmic management, surveillance, atomization, and precarity: Panelists discussed how gig work, typically platform-mediated groundwork, brings foreseen perils mainly affecting workers of the Global Majority in both the Global North and South. Examples included the precariousness of workers labeled as independent contractors and therefore having no access to job security, benefits, or protections, and the use of algorithms to monitor and make decisions about pay, bonuses and performance. Using biased data, algorithms are deciding the livelihood of workers who, as a result, work faster, longer, or undergo more risk, often without any social protections or recourse to justice. It was underscored that this is particularly detrimental for women workers who already face heightened forms of danger from harassment, especially in remote areas with low connectivity. The complex dynamic was discussed between gig work offering a livelihood in the context of high unemployment, but in reality, offering a stunted livelihood–and yet often an alternative to a bleak reality that is taken advantage of by powerful corporations.

In addition to the broad impacts of AI and digital technologies on labor, panelists discussed the vast labor force that powers AI and digital platforms and the need for transparency, organizing infrastructure, protections, and labor standards enforced by both the clients at the top of the contracting chain and local governments. For example, in Kenya, where the average age is 19, and there are high levels of unemployment, Meta has negotiated opaque digital labor agreements with the Kenyan government. This affects content moderators particularly severely, most of whom are moderating content primarily for the EU and USA, and many of whom are unable to work after a few months on the job due to PTSD and mental health decline. There are few regulations or social protections, and the workers are treated as disposable. The need to organize labor emerged as paramount in this discussion

Worker organizing and building countervailing power: A wide variety of sectors and sub-sectors are impacted by digitization, AI, and algorithmic management, each with its issues and lessons. Discussions on how to organize workers surfaced the writer's strike in Hollywood as a good model for trade unions to negotiate *before* the technologies are widely used rather than after the fact. Panelists offered examples of where the challenges and opportunities lie in labour organizing. For example, workers in places like Amazon warehouses, where extreme levels of surveillance and algorithmic management have been shown to lead to twice as many injuries as in similar warehouses–worsened when robotics are in use–are starting to organize across the globe. Gig workers on delivery platforms such as Deliveroo, DoorDash or Zomato suffer more injuries in insecure work environments and harassment from the authorities targeting undocumented workers and are being organized by smaller or global trade unions. Discussions also pointed out how difficult it is to organize under these conditions, requiring a holistic approach that

includes strong trade unions and worker organizing but goes beyond this to connect the dots between AI, work, food, the environment, health, and conflict over access to scarce resources.

What next: core questions for labor: How can we empower workers and organize using digital technologies? What are the worst disruptions, and how can we address them? For example, surveillance, the political and economic power of Big Tech companies, and labor conditions across digital tech and AI value chains. How do we think about workers as a center of building countervailing power–but with labor as a movement fighting for **everybody**, not only for their working conditions? This is a tried and tested trade union organizing model, but what does it look like in the context of the digital economy? A multi-stakeholder, issue, and sector approach is needed to organize workers and use all the strategies and tactics–from union organizing to strategic litigation to actively designing and building alternative technologies, companies, and economic models.

PUBLIC SECTOR INFRASTRUCTURE, DATA & GOVERNANCE

These discussions explored the potential of alternative forms of building and financing digital infrastructure outside of the Big Tech-dominated AI stack, including proposals that are often bunched together under the moniker "digital public infrastructures" or "public digital infrastructures." Globally, there are fairly heterogeneous projects under this umbrella, but one prominent theme was that there is a need for these initiatives to foreground both governance and democratic control so that they can be held accountable to the broader public interest. Conversations covered:

» Big Tech's capture of public services and critical public infrastructure.

» Growing adoption of digital public infrastructures (DPI) built and used for mass surveillance, authoritarian rule, and oppression—caution and opportunity.

» Funding, building, and scaling digital tech, data, and AI to meet public needs, preserve rights, and serve as public goods with democratic ownership and control.

» Ethical, regulatory, political, legal, and technical considerations.

One speaker talked about how digital technologies and AI—or rather the increasingly powerful global corporations that own and profit from these technologies—have become the "underlying operating system of our age" by filling critical public functions, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. The point was made that discussions around digital public infrastructure and data as a public good need to go beyond reclaiming the free market from tech monopolies and address how Big Tech's dominance affects the social contract. For example, critical privatized sectors such as health and digital public infrastructures need to be reimagined in ways that prioritize public good, sustainability, and democratic control, not after the fact but as the role of digital technology and AI is evolving. The conversation acknowledged that embracing decolonial, feminist, and community-driven approaches that foster equitable, inclusive, and sustainable (digital) futures is part of this process. The challenge of achieving this was also acknowledged as it requires addressing the underlying economic model and comes up against corporate dominance (see the section on lobbying and market concentration), political pressures

that push for market-driven solutions, financial constraints–and the need for political will. The conversation returned to labor organizing and building countervailing power as one way of addressing at least the latter.

Rooting solutions in political and economic realities: Discussions here included pragmatism and realpolitik when discussing alternatives and how to build them. This included, for example, that austerity measures, the debt crises, and financial pressures in many countries hinder independent technological advancements. The Global North/South dynamic also emerged here, focused on inequitable value extraction and the need for financial and technological investments. Where governments are unable or unwilling to provide this, big tech companies fill the gap. Understanding this political and economic reality is central to creating globally equitable solutions, it was argued, and that one way of thinking about future developments is to start by looking at the **capacities and resources** each country has to develop and implement alternatives that can be built and invested in.

Digital public goods and alternatives: A lot of discussions focused on "digital public infrastructures (DPI)" or "public digital infrastructures." One theme here was that technology solutions such as open-source software, data, and AI models should be public goods that are non-exclusive and available for public use, prioritizing societal well-being over market-driven purposes, democratic control, global equity, and sustainability. For some, this included promoting regenerative and community-centered technological developments. It was emphasized that DPI, especially when state-owned or controlled, is currently often designed and used for mass surveillance, authoritarian rule, and oppression by public bodies. There was a call to be cautious and not romanticize DPI when thinking about digital futures.

Decolonial and feminist approaches to digital tech and AI: There was a call for a shift in the underlying political ideologies that underpin thinking on new (digital) economic models. It was put forward that current AI systems perpetuate surveillance, data extractivism, and exploitative practices and that decolonial and feminist perspectives are needed, including recognizing indigenous and local knowledge systems and emphasizing environmental justice, data sovereignty, human rights, and focusing on community needs.

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