



RESPONSIBLE
AI TRUST

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REBALANCING AI GOVERNANCE

India and the BRICS Call for a UN-
Led, Equity-Centred Model

PRESENTED AND LED BY

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FOREWORD FROM THE FOUNDER



At Responsible AI Trust, our purpose is simple yet vital: to strengthen global confidence in intelligent systems.

Across industries and borders, AI is redefining how decisions are made, risks are managed, and accountability is shared. With this transformation comes a collective responsibility to ensure that technology remains aligned with human values, transparency, and fairness.

Each brief we publish represents collaborative work from researchers, advisors, and practitioners who believe that trust must be earned through clarity, governance, and evidence. Together, we translate complex regulation into actionable insight, helping leaders navigate uncertainty with structure and foresight.

Responsible AI is not a trend, it is the foundation of sustainable innovation. As systems grow more capable, our frameworks for oversight must grow equally intelligent, adaptive, and globally connected.

Thank you for being part of this effort to turn principles into practice, and ideas into accountability.

Lehar Gupta

Founder & CEO, Responsible AI Trust

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ABOUT THIS BRIEF

Rebalancing AI Governance: India and the BRICS Call for a UN-Led, Equity-Centred Model

This brief examines the 2025 BRICS Rio Declaration on AI Governance and its implications for the future of global AI regulation. It presents a comparative view of how BRICS, with India playing a central role, is advancing an equity-centred, UN-led governance model alongside existing EU and US approaches. The analysis highlights where these models align, diverge, and compete in shaping global AI norms.

Purpose and Motivation:

AI governance has moved from principle to power. Regulatory choices now shape innovation, investment, and global influence. This brief helps leaders understand how the BRICS proposal addresses regulatory fragmentation, elevates Global South priorities, and reframes AI governance around equity, sovereignty, and multilateral cooperation.

Audience:

Written for executives, policymakers, regulators, compliance leaders, and investors responsible for aligning AI innovation with governance, strategy, and trust across jurisdictions.

Methodology:

Based on primary policy sources including the BRICS Rio Declaration, UN reports, and EU and US AI frameworks. The analysis applies comparative policy mapping and expert synthesis to assess alignment, divergence, and implementation readiness, with a focus on India's bridging role.

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Future updates will reflect UN-led governance progress, BRICS implementation, and global interoperability benchmarks.

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LEADER'S DASHBOARD



General Information

Brief Title	: Rebalancing AI Governance: India and the BRICS Call for a UN-Led, Equity-Centred Model
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Executive Summary

The 2025 BRICS Rio Declaration signals a strategic shift in global AI governance. For the first time, a Global South coalition has advanced a UN-led, equity-centred framework to counter regulatory fragmentation, rebalance digital power, and ensure inclusive access to AI benefits. India emerges as the pivotal bridge shaping convergence between Global South priorities and Global North governance systems.

Strategic Insight

Global AI governance is now defined by three competing models:

- **BRICS:** Equity, digital sovereignty, and UN-led multilateralism
- **EU:** Rights-driven, compliance-heavy regional regulation
- **US:** Innovation-first, decentralised, market-led strategy

BRICS challenges the dominance of Global North rule-setting by prioritising development, inclusion, and sovereign choice while rejecting fragmented regional governance. India's credibility, scale, and technical capacity position it as the primary convergence actor across these models.

Executive Priorities - "Now vs Next"

Now (2025–2030)	Next (2030–2040)
Anchor AI governance within UN-led coordination	Establish interoperable global AI governance baselines
Invest in Global South capacity: data, compute, skills	Enable cross-border AI trust and trade mechanisms
Protect digital sovereignty and national policy space	Link AI governance to global trade and development frameworks
Promote principles-based alignment across BRICS	Transition from principles to shared enforcement tools

LEADER'S DASHBOARD



Maturity Model Snapshot - "BRICS Readiness"

Level	Description	Governance Signal
1. Fragmented	Ad-hoc national AI policies	Regulatory divergence
2. Aligned	Shared principles, voluntary coordination	Political consensus
3. Coordinated	UN-centred dialogue, capacity-building	Emerging convergence
4. Operational	Shared evaluation tools and safeguards	Systemic trust
5. Interoperable	Portable governance across borders	Global AI legitimacy

Key Takeaways for Leaders

- AI governance is now geopolitical infrastructure, not policy theory
- Equity and sovereignty are becoming global governance demands
- Fragmentation increases risk, cost, and exclusion
- India is the decisive bridge actor in global AI convergence
- UN-led coordination is the only scalable legitimacy path

Strategic Call to Action

Leaders should act now to:

- Support UN-centred AI governance mechanisms
- Fund Global South AI capacity-building at scale
- Align sovereignty with multilateral cooperation
- Push for interoperable safety, evaluation, and reporting tools
- Prevent AI governance from hardening into rival regulatory blocs

These actions will define who shapes the AI economy and who merely adopts it.

Presented & Led by

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EXECUTIVE TAKEAWAYS

Rebalancing AI Governance

The 2025 BRICS Rio Declaration marks a turning point in global AI governance. For the first time, the Global South has collectively called for a UN-led, equity-centered framework to balance innovation, digital sovereignty, and global inclusion. This vision stands in contrast to the EU's values-driven regulatory model and the US market-driven innovation model.

At the centre of this shift is India, which combines advanced AI capacity, diplomatic credibility, and leadership in Global South initiatives. India's role as a bridge between Global South and Global North will be pivotal in shaping whether AI governance becomes fragmented, or converges into an inclusive, global system.

This brief analyses the BRICS declaration in comparison with EU and US approaches, highlights India's leadership, and outlines implications for world leaders.



INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is increasingly recognised as a transformative technology with profound economic, social, and geopolitical implications. Estimates suggest that AI could contribute \$15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030, reshaping industries, governance, and international power structures. As a result, AI governance has become one of the most pressing global policy challenges, requiring frameworks that balance innovation, equity, security, and rights. This is very important as regulation fosters innovation by creating a stable and predictable environment that attracts investment, stimulates market competition, and builds public trust.

At the same time, AI is emerging within an era of heightened geopolitical rivalry, exemplified by the United States' imposition of export controls on semiconductors. Such tensions increasingly force countries, especially in the Global South, to navigate competing economic and political blocs. Regulatory efforts around the world like the European Union's AI Act, South Korea's AI Basic Act, the Brazilian AI Bill, and the United Kingdom's proposed AI Bill illustrate growing international attention to these challenges.

The EU's AI Act (2024) stands as the first comprehensive regional regulatory framework, focused on fundamental rights and risk-based oversight. In contrast, the United States' AI Action Plan (2025) prioritises innovation, security, and voluntary standards. Yet the governance debate to date has been dominated by the Global North, reinforced by instruments such as the Council of Europe adopted the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence in 2024, the first binding international treaty on AI. It requires states to ensure that AI systems uphold human rights, democratic principles, and the rule of law, prioritizing safeguards, accountability, and transparency over innovation-led governance. Its global influence will depend on whether non-European countries, particularly from the Global South, choose to join and shape its implementation. Broader participation could turn the treaty into a platform for more inclusive norm-setting, reducing the dominance of EU-centric approaches.

Against this backdrop, the BRICS Rio Declaration on AI Governance (2025) stands out as the first coordinated Global South-led call for a UN-centred, equity-driven governance model. This declaration highlights the need to avoid regulatory fragmentation, protect



INTRODUCTION

digital sovereignty, and ensure all countries, regardless of development stage can benefit from AI.

This policy brief examines the BRICS Rio Declaration in comparative perspective, contrasting it with the EU's human-centric regulatory model and the US's market-driven innovation-first approach. It places particular emphasis on India's evolving role as both a Global South leader and a bridge to the Global North.

This brief assesses how the BRICS Rio Declaration's call for a UN-led, equity-centred model compares with the EU's rights-driven regulation and the US's market-driven innovation strategy, while highlighting India's pivotal role in bridging North-South divides.

Key Analytical Angles

1. Principles and Priorities - The Rio Declaration articulates an equity and sovereignty driven vision of AI governance, positioning the UN as the central platform and rejecting fragmented regional frameworks.
2. EU Comparison - Unlike the EU's human-centric, compliance-heavy model anchored in binding regulation and normative export, BRICS prioritises inclusion, development, and flexibility for diverse national contexts.
3. US Comparison - In contrast to the US's decentralised, innovation-first strategy built on voluntary standards and strategic competition, BRICS emphasises multilateral cooperation, fair competition, and development equity, while also advocating for safety.
4. India's Role - India's evolving AI strategy, spanning domestic capacity-building, responsible AI institutions, and international leadership, enables it to anchor BRICS priorities while maintaining credibility with the EU and US



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

BRICS Rio Declaration

The BRICS coalition, originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, went through an expansion to add more members. Four new members - Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) joined in 2024, followed by Indonesia as the tenth member in January 2025. In addition to this, other nations have been designated as partner countries and BRICS leaders, particularly Russia, have announced this enlargement as a defining moment, framing it as the rise of a "global majority" and a step toward a post-Western order.

BRICS represents roughly 45% of the world's population, accounts for over 35% of global GDP (measured in Purchasing Power Parity), and produces around 30% of the world's oil. Beyond scale, BRICS has also invested in institution-building, establishing the Contingent Reserve Arrangement and the New Development Bank. Alongside these, the bloc has fostered a web of intergovernmental cooperation spanning energy, health, climate, and technology- reflecting its ambition to become a global governance actor, not just a geopolitical counterweight.

BRICS' perspective on AI is largely instrumental and optimistic: it is seen as a catalyst for economic growth, technological progress, and inclusive societies. This emphasis on AI as a driver of development explains why BRICS countries established a dedicated AI Study Group in August 2023 to "jointly fend off risks" while advancing shared priorities.

The 2025 BRICS Rio Declaration on AI Governance marks a significant intervention in global debates. The declaration calls for UN-led multilateralism as the foundation for AI governance, explicitly rejecting fragmented or exclusionary regional frameworks.

Its principles can be summarised across several key dimensions:

- Equity and Inclusion - AI should reflect cultural, linguistic, and demographic diversity. All countries must have the right to benefit from AI, irrespective of development stage.
- Digital Sovereignty - States should retain agency over their AI ecosystems, including data, infrastructure, and regulation, rejecting one-size-fits-all models.
- Global Cooperation - While affirming sovereignty, BRICS calls for inclusive governance under the UN, aligning with its emphasis on capacity-building and multistakeholder oversight.



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

BRICS Rio Declaration

- Market Regulation and Fair Competition - AI markets should be transparent, fair, and open to smaller players, particularly from developing economies.
- Data Governance - Privacy and rights must be safeguarded while ensuring equitable access to datasets for Global South countries.
- Sustainable Development - AI should advance health, education, agriculture, and climate resilience.
- Bias and Safety - Systems must be explainable, trustworthy, and free from discriminatory bias.

While the principles are clearly established, BRICS is still in the early stages of translating them into concrete, operational mechanisms. Current guidance on safety, ethics, and fairness is largely principles-based, providing a framework for responsible AI development without imposing legally binding obligations. Unlike the EU, which categorises AI systems by risk levels and enforces strict regulatory measures for high-risk applications, BRICS adopts a broad, flexible approach that applies these overarching principles to all AI systems. This allows for inclusivity and adaptability across diverse member states but also highlights the need for further development of practical enforcement tools, monitoring processes, and capacity-building initiatives to ensure these principles are effectively implemented.

While the principles are clearly established, BRICS is still in the early stages of translating them into concrete, operational mechanisms. To ensure these principles lead to real impact, BRICS must define measurable commitments such as capacity-building targets for skills, compute, and data governance; safeguards for high-risk uses and interoperable evaluation tools that allow consistent safety and fairness checks across jurisdictions. Current guidance on safety, ethics, and fairness remains largely principles-based, providing a framework for responsible AI development without imposing legally binding obligations. Unlike the EU, which categorises AI systems by risk levels and enforces strict regulatory measures for high-risk applications, BRICS adopts a broad, flexible approach that applies these overarching principles to all AI systems. This inclusivity and adaptability across diverse member states is valuable, but it underscores the urgency of developing practical enforcement tools like standardised safety baselines, shared evaluation suites and



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BRICS Rio Declaration

transparent progress dashboards, alongside capacity-building initiatives to ensure these principles are effectively implemented.

BRICS' vision resonates closely with the United Nations' call for a Global AI Governance Framework that promotes inclusivity, capacity-building, and multistakeholder oversight (UN High-Level Advisory Body, 2024). The UN has further proposed mechanisms such as a global scientific panel on AI risks and international repositories for safety practices. This echoes BRICS' emphasis on cooperation, development, and digital sovereignty.

In this sense, the Rio Declaration represents more than a governance proposal, it signals a shift in how global rules are contested and written. BRICS is not simply reacting to EU or US models but actively advocating for a governance framework that centres equity, sovereignty, and development as global norms.



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

EU AI Act

The European Union's AI Act represents one of the world's first comprehensive legal frameworks dedicated to regulating artificial intelligence. It adopts a risk-based classification system that categorises AI systems into unacceptable, high, limited, and minimal risk categories. Prohibited AI systems such as those employing manipulative techniques or social scoring are banned outright, while high-risk AI systems are subject to stringent regulatory requirements covering the entire AI lifecycle. Limited-risk systems must meet transparency obligations to inform users they are interacting with AI, whereas minimal-risk AI applications remain largely unregulated. This tiered structure reflects the EU's emphasis on human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the precautionary principle, aiming to foster trust in AI technologies while safeguarding citizens from potential harms.

Beyond its protective purpose, the Act aspires to position Europe as a global leader in trustworthy AI governance. It embeds ethical and legal accountability directly into the development process, ensuring that AI systems deployed in critical areas such as healthcare, transport, or law enforcement should undergo rigorous risk management, testing, and human oversight. The inclusion of General Purpose AI (GPAI) models within the regulatory scope underscores the EU's forward-looking approach, as these systems now play a foundational role in modern AI ecosystems. Transparency obligations, copyright compliance, and risk mitigation mechanisms for GPAI reflect an attempt to ensure fairness and accountability even for large-scale AI models. Institutionally, the creation of the AI Office and AI Board signals a concerted effort to coordinate enforcement and harmonise national approaches, demonstrating the EU's ambition to create a unified regulatory environment across member states.

However, the implementation phase has already exposed a number of challenges. The staggered enforcement timeline, where key provisions will only take effect between 2025 and 2026, highlights the EU's limited administrative and technical capacity to operationalise such a complex framework. Many member states still lack the institutional readiness to establish competent authorities, while the newly formed AI Office and AI Board remain in early stages of coordination. Smaller companies have voiced concerns over the high cost of compliance, with documentation, testing, and transparency obligations disproportionately



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

impacting their ability to innovate. Critics warn that this heavily precautionary approach risks creating an overly regulatory environment that may stifle competitiveness and deter investment in the European AI sector. Moreover, Europe's regulatory assertiveness has, at times, left it isolated from other Western partners. Following the Paris AI Action Summit, the US and UK's refusal to endorse the final declaration revealed a growing divergence in AI governance philosophies between Europe's model and the more flexible, innovation-led approaches favoured elsewhere. As Marta Cantero Gamito notes, Europe must consolidate its internal capacity before projecting global leadership, as continued isolation risks accelerating the EU's marginalisation and ceding normative ground to authoritarian models.

Despite these constraints, the EU AI Act remains a landmark in global AI governance. It is a bold attempt to enshrine fundamental rights, transparency, and accountability within a fast-evolving technological landscape. The Act's comprehensive oversight mechanisms and emphasis on human-centric design reflect Europe's commitment to responsible innovation. Yet, its long-term success will depend on whether the EU can bridge the gap between regulatory ambition and practical enforcement. Strengthening institutional capacity, fostering cross-border collaboration, and maintaining engagement with global partners will be essential to ensure that the EU's values-driven approach not only safeguards citizens but also sustains innovation and influence in the global AI ecosystem.

The United States AI Strategy

The United States AI Action Plan aims to create an environment that strongly supports private-sector-led innovation by reducing bureaucratic barriers and avoiding overly restrictive regulations. Key steps include rescinding previous executive orders that imposed onerous regulatory regimes and working with federal agencies to repeal or revise rules that could stifle AI development. The overarching goal is to empower businesses and startups to innovate rapidly, fostering economic growth while maintaining minimal federal oversight. Central to the U.S. strategy is a commitment to protecting free speech and ensuring AI systems pursue objective truth, while balancing innovation with national security considerations. The plan emphasises light-touch enforcement, with targeted measures to address specific emerging risks while encouraging broad adoption of AI technologies across industries.



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The Action Plan also promotes enhancing AI infrastructure, expanding access to large-scale computing resources, and supporting open weight and open source models for research and innovation. Recognizing the impact of AI on the workforce, the government encourages initiatives to improve AI literacy and provide workforce retraining. It seeks to accelerate AI adoption in government operations to improve public service efficiency, complemented by legal measures such as the TAKE IT DOWN Act, which targets malicious AI applications, including deepfakes. Overall, the Plan reflects a market-driven innovation framework, positioning the federal government as both an enabler of rapid technological development and a protector against AI-related threats, while attempting to maintain bipartisan support and U.S. leadership in international AI governance.

Despite these ambitions, the U.S. approach faces several significant challenges. Open weight models and open source initiatives, while accelerating innovation, also increase exposure to misuse, adversarial manipulation, and cybersecurity risks. Unlike the EU AI Act, which embeds specific security and risk-management requirements across the AI lifecycle, the U.S. framework lacks detailed operational guidance, leaving enforcement and safety measures largely voluntary or dependent on industry discretion. There are also risks related to funding gaps, potential conflicts with other federal priorities, and weakening of technological expertise due to recent personnel changes and withdrawals from multilateral institutions, which could undermine U.S. influence in international AI standard-setting. Overall, the U.S. framework reflects a deliberate trade-off- prioritising rapid innovation and global competitiveness while leaving many safety and regulatory details open to interpretation.

Compared with the EU AI Act, which establishes a legally binding framework with clear obligations, enforcement mechanisms, and risk-management requirements, the United States currently lacks a comprehensive federal law governing AI. The federal AI Action Plan remains largely advisory and non-binding, relying on voluntary industry compliance and light-touch guidance. In this context, state-level measures such as California's SB 53 are beginning to fill the regulatory gap. SB 53 mandates that major AI companies disclose safety protocols, assess and mitigate catastrophic risks, and report critical safety incidents within 15 days, while also including whistleblower protections. Anthropic has publicly



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

endorsed SB 53, noting that it aligns with the company's existing safety practices, such as publishing Responsible Scaling Policies and system cards, and supports the bill's "trust but verify" approach. SB 53 illustrates how states are moving to fill gaps left by the federal government, introducing enforceable obligations for AI developers where federal guidance remains non-binding and largely advisory. This contrast underscores a fundamental difference in regulatory philosophy: the EU prioritises precaution, formal oversight, and enforceable compliance, whereas the U.S. emphasises market-driven innovation and industry-led accountability, relying on states and voluntary standards to address gaps in enforceability.



BRICS vs EU vs US

Dimension	BRICS (Rio Declaration, 2025)	EU (AI Act, Human-Centric)	US (AI Action Plan, Innovation-First)
Core Philosophy	Equity, UN-led multilateralism, Global South voice	Fundamental rights, risk-based regulation	Market-driven innovation, security focus
Governance Model	Multilateral, sovereignty-respecting	Regional regulatory bloc	National strategy, decentralized private sector
Enforcement	Proposed UN-centered mechanisms, early stage	Binding legal obligations, penalties	Non-binding standards, voluntary frameworks
Innovation Lens	Equity, inclusion, capacity-building for Global South	Responsible innovation within risk tiers	Growth, competitiveness, global leadership
Scope of AI Systems	Broad principles-based guidance	High-risk and general purpose AI systems	Sectoral, general innovation focus
Safety & Ethics	Principles-based, inclusion-focused	Risk-tiered, precautionary, rights-based	Voluntary, industry-led responsibility
Global Posture	Rebalancing power, South-led vision	Human-centric, normative export	Tech dominance, strategic competition
Implementation Readiness	Early-stage, varied maturity across members	Advanced but facing operational challenges	High innovation, uneven safety compliance

*Light-background version available in Appendix 2



NATIONAL AI STRATEGY

India's National AI Strategy and Leadership within BRICS

India's AI strategy has evolved rapidly, reflecting its ambition to harness AI for economic growth while embedding safeguards, governance, and international collaboration. The framework rests on three interconnected pillars: domestic infrastructure, responsible governance and safety, and international engagement through BRICS and multilateral forums.

1. Domestic Infrastructure

India's domestic AI ecosystem is underpinned by initiatives that integrate innovation, infrastructure, and governance.

- **IndiaAI Mission (2020):** Launched as the first national AI resource platform, IndiaAI provides informational, networking, and infrastructure resources including curated datasets, affordable compute, and the development of indigenous foundation models such as LMMs and SLMs aligned with India's linguistic and societal needs.
- **AI for Viksit Bharat Roadmap (NITI Aayog, 2025):** Builds on the Mission with a comprehensive framework to scale AI capacity and secure an estimated USD 500–600bn GDP contribution by 2035. Key measures include:
 - Deployment of 38,000+ GPUs via a federated compute network.
 - Development of regional large language models addressing India's linguistic diversity.
 - Establishment of a consent-based, anonymised public dataset platform to strengthen data sovereignty.
 - Expansion of AI skilling programmes across Tier 2 and 3 cities, supported by AI/Data Labs.
 - Sectoral integration in healthcare, agriculture, education, and mobility.
- **Bhashini Project:** India hosts over 350 AI-based language models that have processed more than one billion tasks, supporting 50 government departments and 25 state governments. Technology developed by firms such as Reverie Language Technologies has enabled widespread deployment of Indian-language AI systems.



NATIONAL AI STRATEGY

India's National AI Strategy and Leadership within BRICS

2. Responsible AI Institutions and Safety

India is institutionalising its commitment to safe and ethical AI through newly created frameworks and advisory bodies.

- IndiaAI Safety Institute (2025): Sets national standards for safe AI deployment and aligns domestic practices with global safety debates.
- AI Competency Framework (MeitY, 2024): Defines training and oversight requirements for public officials to ensure responsible integration of AI into governance.
- Report on AI Governance Guidelines (2025): Prepared by a multi-stakeholder advisory group under the Principal Scientific Adviser, this report conducted a gap analysis of existing Indian laws and AI risks. It proposed a lifecycle risk approach, from development to diffusion that emphasises transparency, accountability, and a coordinated, whole-of-government framework to prevent fragmented oversight.

3. International Engagement and Leadership within BRICS

India is positioning itself as a bridge between developed and developing nations, advancing a vision of equitable and responsible AI governance.

- GPAI Summit (2024): As lead chair, India championed applied AI research and policies aligned with Global South priorities.
- Within BRICS: Within BRICS, India's 2025 chairship has emphasised advancing the bloc's equity-focused vision on AI governance. The Joint Media Statement highlights India's role in promoting international cooperation, capacity-building, and equitable access to AI resources, particularly for developing countries. Through this leadership, India continues to operationalise the Rio Declaration's principles, aligning BRICS efforts with UN-led multilateral frameworks and supporting initiatives that strengthen governance, collaboration, and responsible AI adoption across member states
- Research Leadership: Ranked 2nd globally in AI research publications (Oxford Insights, 2024), India brings both technical expertise and diplomatic credibility to multilateral AI forums.



NATIONAL AI STRATEGY

India's National AI Strategy and Leadership within BRICS

Analytical Positioning

India's AI strategy represents a strategic synthesis: domestically, it emphasises sovereignty, innovation, and inclusive economic growth; internationally, it advocates for equity and capacity-building. The combination of compute infrastructure, linguistic diversity initiatives, indigenous foundation model development, and robust governance gap analyses positions India as both a champion for the Global South and a trusted partner for advanced economies. As the largest democracy in BRICS, India is uniquely placed to bridge the normative divide between Western safety-oriented frameworks and Global South developmental priorities, shaping an AI governance model that balances safety, innovation, and fairness



WORLD VIEW

Implications for Global Leaders

The BRICS Rio Declaration on AI marks a potentially pivotal moment in reshaping global governance, particularly for developing nations seeking greater inclusion in rulemaking. It represents both an opportunity to correct inequities in AI access and a test of how effectively emerging powers can coordinate on shared safety and innovation goals.

1. Advancing Global Equity and Inclusion

The Declaration's commitment to equitable access to AI resources offers a pathway for the Global South to participate in shaping international AI standards, rather than merely adopting those of the Global North. If realised, this could enable more balanced decision-making, reflecting diverse cultural and developmental contexts. A UN-led framework, as proposed by BRICS, could help redistribute power in global governance, ensuring that marginalised nations are active contributors to AI's future.

2. Strengthening Digital Sovereignty and Collaborative Multilateralism

BRICS' emphasis on digital sovereignty allows states to retain control over their AI ecosystems while engaging in collective governance. For developing nations, this represents a chance to advance domestic innovation without becoming overly reliant on external regulatory or technological models. By aligning sovereignty with cooperation, the bloc positions itself as a potential counterweight to existing Western-dominated regulatory paradigms such as the EU AI Act, offering an alternative governance path rooted in inclusivity and balance.

3. India's Leadership and Bridging Role

India's growing leadership within BRICS underscores its strategic position as both a technical and diplomatic bridge. Through initiatives like the IndiaAI Mission, the AI for Viksit Bharat Roadmap, and the IndiaAI Safety Institute, India demonstrates strong capacity to operationalise responsible AI governance domestically. At the international level, India's GPAI chairmanship and participation in the Bletchley and Seoul Declarations reflect its credibility in global safety dialogues. Within BRICS, India is well placed to drive capacity-building, data-sharing, and equitable infrastructure development, translating the Rio Declaration's aspirations into actionable frameworks that promote both innovation and



WORLD VIEW

Implications for Global Leaders

accountability.

At the same time, India faces challenges in harmonising these ambitions with the varied priorities and capabilities of BRICS members. Differences in AI maturity, regulatory experience, and infrastructure across member states require careful coordination to ensure meaningful participation. Additionally, India must balance its push for equitable and inclusive AI governance with its own domestic economic and technological objectives, making leadership a delicate exercise of diplomacy, capacity-building, and strategic prioritisation.

4. Persistent Challenges: Fragmentation, Capacity, and Enforcement

Despite its ambition, the Rio Declaration remains aspirational, with no binding enforcement mechanisms or clear implementation strategy. The document lacks defined compliance or even voluntary cooperation measures, contrasting sharply with the EU's legally binding AI Act. This absence risks a "flocking of initiatives," where overlapping but uncoordinated efforts further fragment global AI governance. Moreover, disparities in AI maturity among BRICS members complicate joint action: while China, India, and Russia have robust AI ecosystems, countries like Ethiopia or Egypt face capacity gaps in infrastructure, workforce, and regulatory readiness. Finally, the tension between national sovereignty and UN-led governance could limit cohesion - if members prioritise domestic control over shared standards, enforcement will remain weak.

Still, the Declaration could be a starting point for convergence, signalling openness to a more inclusive and balanced global conversation led in part by the Global South.



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

For policymakers and regulators

AI governance is no longer a regional exercise. The BRICS Rio Declaration signals that future legitimacy will be shaped through UN-anchored coordination, not unilateral rule-setting. Engagement, interoperability, and capacity-building will matter as much as formal regulation.

For BRICS and Global South leaders

This is a moment of agency. The Declaration creates space to shape global norms rather than inherit them, provided principles are translated into shared tools, metrics, and implementation pathways.

For EU and US decision-makers

The emerging governance layer is additive, not adversarial. Existing frameworks and innovation models remain influential, but their impact will increasingly depend on interoperability with a broader, multilateral system.

For enterprises and investors

AI governance is becoming infrastructure for market access, trade, and long-term value. Organisations that invest early in trust, transparency, and cross-border readiness will move faster and with lower risk.

For international institutions

The window is open to convene, coordinate, and operationalise global AI governance before fragmentation hardens. Capacity-building and shared baselines are now strategic necessities.



FINAL WORDS

The BRICS Rio Declaration marks a structural shift in how global AI governance will be contested and constructed. It reframes governance away from dominance and toward legitimacy, equity, and participation under a UN-centred model. This does not resolve the governance challenge, but it redraws the map.

The decisive test ahead is execution. Principles will only matter if they are converted into operational infrastructure: shared metrics, interoperable safeguards, and transparent coordination mechanisms. India's role as a bridge between Global South priorities and Global North systems will be central to whether convergence or fragmentation prevails.

AI governance is no longer a future debate. It is the infrastructure through which global participation, trust, and influence will be determined. Those who act early will help shape the system. Those who wait will adapt to it.



RESEARCHER REFLECTIONS



Working on this brief underscored how AI governance is not only a technical challenge but a deeply geopolitical one. Governance frameworks are emerging as instruments of global influence, shaping who sets the rules and who benefits from them. The BRICS Rio Declaration represents a significant inflection point: for the first time, a coalition of emerging economies has articulated a vision that prioritizes equity, digital sovereignty, and multilateralism under the UN. This is more than a policy statement, it signals a redistribution of normative power in technology governance, challenging

the dominance of Global North-led models.

The research also revealed a critical implementation gap. While BRICS promotes inclusion and sovereignty, these principles will only matter if translated into enforceable mechanisms. Governance needs measurable targets, shared evaluation protocols, and transparent reporting systems to move from aspiration to action. Without these tools, fragmentation will persist, and trust in global AI governance will erode. Closing this gap is essential for turning equity into a practical reality.

Policy Takeaways for Leaders

- **Champion UN-Led Dialogue:** Support an inclusive, UN-coordinated forum to align regional frameworks and minimum safety baselines, interoperable evaluation methods, and cross-border incident reporting to prevent fragmented governance blocs.
- **Empower India's Bridge Role:** Back India's leadership as a credible mediator between advanced and emerging economies, leveraging its experience to operationalise equitable AI governance.
- **Invest in Capacity-Building:** Prioritise funding and technical assistance for developing nations to enable meaningful participation in AI safety, ethics, and infrastructure development.
- **Safeguard Digital Sovereignty:** Embed principles of sovereignty and equity in international AI standards, ensuring the Global South retains agency over its AI ecosystems.
- **Promote Convergence, Not Competition:** Encourage coordination between BRICS, the EU, and the US to develop interoperable, trust-based safety and accountability mechanisms.

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ADVISOR REFLECTIONS



The BRICS Rio Declaration is a welcome rebalancing of AI governance. By centring the United Nations, equity, and digital sovereignty, BRICS challenge the one-way export of Global North rules while affirming that AI must advance fundamental rights, strengthen democratic institutions, and uphold the rule of law. India's leadership, through its G20 focus on Digital Public Infrastructure, "Responsible AI for All," and its stewardship in multistakeholder forums shows how rights-

centred, open standards and multilingual access can scale across the Global South. This agenda can widen participation without lowering standards if it is translated into operational commitments that regulators and firms can implement and be held to.

An equity-centred UN track should establish measurable capacity-building targets (skills, data governance, and shared compute), safeguards for high-risk uses, protections for creators and personal data, and decision-making seats for low- and middle-income countries. The key risk is "aspirational drift": inclusive principles that leave standards fragmented and accountability thin. The remedy is to pair values with tools, tests, and transparency common baselines, shared evaluation methods, interoperable incident reporting, and regular public progress reports.

Recommendations for policymakers:

- Convene at the UN: Align minimum safety baselines and cross-border incident reporting with clear, public rules grounded in fundamental rights and the rule of law.
- Finance public goods: Fund compute credits, multilingual datasets, and open evaluation suites so low-resource states can build, audit, and verify.
- Procure for rights: Require rights-by-design and ban abusive surveillance in government AI contracts; mandate public-interest impact assessments.
- Resource oversight: Finance independent supervisory bodies; protect whistleblowers and enable meaningful civil-society participation to safeguard democratic institutions.
- Ensure contestability: Address model, cloud, and chip bottlenecks that enable gatekeeping and entrench lock-in.

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This brief confirms that AI governance has crossed a structural threshold. It is no longer a question of whether to regulate, but who defines legitimacy. The 2025 BRICS Rio Declaration is the first coordinated signal that global AI governance will not be resolved through regional dominance or unilateral standard-setting, but through multilateral negotiation under the United Nations. What is most consequential is not the Declaration's principles but its reframing of authority. By centring equity, digital sovereignty, and development, BRICS challenges the assumption that governance maturity

flows only from the Global North outward. This marks a redistribution of normative power in technology governance that will shape AI trade, investment, and legitimacy over the next decade. This shift does not displace existing regulatory leadership or innovation pathways; it introduces a UN-anchored coordination layer that enables interoperable safety and trust baselines without centralised control. For innovation-led systems, this coordination layer preserves regulatory flexibility while reducing cross-border friction, enabling faster scale without sacrificing safety or competitiveness.

At the same time, the research exposes a clear execution gap. Principles alone will not rebalance governance. Without shared metrics, interoperable evaluation tools, and transparent progress mechanisms, equity risks remaining aspirational. The success of the BRICS position will depend on its ability to convert political alignment into operational infrastructure. India's role stands out as decisive. India is not positioned as an ideological counterweight, but as a bridge actor capable of translating Global South priorities into globally credible governance mechanisms. Its combination of scale, technical capacity, democratic legitimacy, and multilateral leadership gives it disproportionate influence over whether convergence or fragmentation prevails. The central insight from this work is simple but consequential: AI governance is becoming infrastructure for global participation. Countries and organisations that invest early in trust, capacity, and interoperability will shape the rules. Those that do not will inherit them. This brief should therefore be read not as a position paper, but as an early map of where authority, alignment, and legitimacy in AI governance are moving next.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1 - Primary Legal and Regulatory Texts

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1 - Primary Legal and Regulatory Texts

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APPENDIX

Appendix 2 - Light-background version for BRICS vs EU vs US

BRICS vs EU vs US

Dimension	BRICS (Rio Declaration, 2025)	EU (AI Act, Human-Centric)	US (AI Action Plan, Innovation-First)
Core Philosophy	Equity, UN-led multilateralism, Global South voice	Fundamental rights, risk-based regulation	Market-driven innovation, security focus
Governance Model	Multilateral, sovereignty-respecting	Regional regulatory bloc	National strategy, decentralized private sector
Enforcement	Proposed UN-centered mechanisms, early stage	Binding legal obligations, penalties	Non-binding standards, voluntary frameworks
Innovation Lens	Equity, inclusion, capacity-building for Global South	Responsible innovation within risk tiers	Growth, competitiveness, global leadership
Scope of AI Systems	Broad principles-based guidance	High-risk and general purpose AI systems	Sectoral, general innovation focus
Safety & Ethics	Principles-based, inclusion-focused	Risk-tiered, precautionary, rights-based	Voluntary, industry-led responsibility
Global Posture	Rebalancing power, South-led vision	Human-centric, normative export	Tech dominance, strategic competition
Implementation Readiness	Early-stage, varied maturity across members	Advanced but facing operational challenges	High innovation, uneven safety compliance



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