

## India's Foreign Policy in the Age of Digital Democracy Era: Opportunities and Strategic Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

The digital age has ushered in a new system of how democracy operates and expresses itself in the world. The interplay of the digital age and democratic governance is transforming the way foreign policy is practiced in the world. In India which is a largest democracy and an emerging world power transformation is especially important. As discussed in this paper, digital democracy whereby there is increased access to the internet, social media and participation by citizens, has started to shape the foreign policy making and diplomatic outreach of India. E-government projects, on-line political mobilization and enhanced access to information have enhanced democracy and citizen-state relations. It analyzes the duality of digital platforms as a means of public diplomacy and a space where the opinion of the domestic population is capable of influencing or limiting international decision-making. Although digital tools have increased the soft power of India and allowed real-time diplomatic interaction, new complexities have also been noted. Social media has led to pressure on the policymakers by the people and has in some instances hastened or limited choices in the foreign policy. Also, the possibility of misinformation, the issue of digital surveillance and cyber diplomacy must be approached carefully in the interconnected world. Also addressed in this article is the need by India to change its foreign policy strategy to include digital diplomacy in a more strategic manner without losing the balance between statecraft and the populace. In the era of digital democracy, foreign policy control will be instrumental in maintaining the Indian democratic spirit and global reputation as India tries to establish itself on the world stage. The key to the Indian democracy in the digital age is the capacity to adjust to the technological change and protect the democratic principles.

**Keywords:** *India's foreign policy, Digital democracy, Cyber diplomacy, Soft power, Technology and International Relations*

The largest democracy in the world India has undergone a tremendous change in its democratic processes with the introduction of digital technologies. Democracy is a system of governance that does not only make the citizens exercises their political rights but also make them involved in shaping the form of their government. They are the

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ones who help in its development, aid in the creation of laws, and even get the right to vote during elections, so they have power to affect the ruling process (Bala & Kumari, 2022). Representative democracies operate on the basis of elected representatives in democratic systems which act on behalf of the populace whereas direct democracies allow citizens to directly exercise their political rights. Leadership in representative democracies is experiencing a great change in the face of digitalization and globalization that brings about new challenges in governance. This dynamic of leadership is becoming more and more influenced by fast-paced global changes, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the current economic uncertainty, social unrest cases, and the war in Ukraine, which undermine and redefine the traditional roles of representatives (Ibid.).

The digital transformation and the resurgence of democracy have been the two forces, which have intersected in the 21st century. With the digital tools transforming the way people talk, governance and international relations democracies worldwide are looking into how to incorporate openness, transparency and citizen empowerment in global diplomacy. The Indian foreign policy under the digital democracy is a special combination of ancient democratic principles, strategic independence, innovativeness in digital technology, and international interaction. The online system has completely changed the structure of international diplomacy. The twenty-first century defines power not just through military or economic strength but also through digital potentials, cyber control, data sovereignty and technological effect. India, being the largest democracy in the world and a fast-emerging digital economy is redefining its foreign policy to capture these new realities. Cyber diplomacy, data alliances, digital public goods, and multilateral internet governance, as well as the foreign policy of India in the digital age, are informed by its strategic aspirations, developmental demands and international relations.

In digital democracy, the introduction of digital communication tools, participation, and how it can be used in the governance process has international implications. In India, there have been efforts such as project Digital India that has expanded connectivity digitally and revolutionized governance. At the same time, the attitude of the government in online interaction and regulation of the digital sphere is increasingly influencing the external perception and foreign policy priorities. Nonetheless, the digital transformation also introduces critical issues of misinformation, data privacy, and digital divide as well as democratic accountability. This article puts forward an analytical discussion of the ways the digital shift is reinforcing and challenging the roots of Indian democracy.

### **A NEW DEMOCRATIC LANDSCAPE IN INDIA**

The history of Indian democracy dates back to the ancient traditions of village meetings (sabha, samiti), but the modern form of democracy was established during the British colonial rule especially when the Government of India Act of 1935 provided provincial autonomy and elections. Following independence; the Indian Constitution was adopted on January 26, 1950, which firmly established a sovereign, democratic republic, which also supported universal adult suffrage, fundamental rights, a federal system, and an independent judiciary. The inaugural general elections of 1951-52, which was conducted in the background of illiteracy and the trauma of partition, proved the feasibility of democracy in a diverse and newly independent country. In spite of the crisis that had rocked the country like the controversial Emergency of 1975-77 during which civil liberties were suspended, the press censored and elections postponed the electorate in India hurriedly reinstated the democratic convention by the 1977 election. The decades have seen India intensify democracy through decentralization (73rd and 74th Amendments), electoral innovations (e.g.,

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EVMs, voter-verifiable paper audit trails) and through regional parties and coalition governments.

In ancient Greek civilization, democracy was understood simply as a political system. During the 17th and 18th centuries, it was mainly associated with idealistic concepts. However, in the modern world especially after the Second World War, democracy has moved away from those ideals and values. Many scholars now emphasize that democracy is fundamentally a political phenomenon. While the roots of democracy go back to ancient Greece, it was not fully embraced or developed by political thinkers until the 19th century.

On this International Day of Democracy, as Chowdhury (2024) aptly states:

*“Long before the concept of democracy became formalised in Western societies, India was a land where democratic principles were deeply embedded in the fabric of governance.”*

India has made the concept of democracy accessible to its entire citizen despite the country's vast diversity and cultural complexities. In contemporary India, the belief in democracy remains strong founded on the principle that every person should participate in decision-making. Democratic practices involve the involvement and guidance of everyone and each individual requires a democratic environment to coexist and manage life alongside others (Aftab and Shah, 2021).

In a broader context, the English economic historian Richard Henry Tawney described democracy as:

*“...not only a form of government but a type of society and a way of life that aligns with it.”*

In this view, democracy is not merely a political idea, but also a guiding principle that determines every sphere of life (Ibid.). India is currently the largest democratic nation in the world with regular multi-party elections that empower marginalized groups by giving them reservation and has adopted constitutional democracy despite the current issues of today that emphasize the strength and constant transformation of the Indian democratic system.

### **DIGITAL DIPLOMACY AS A FOREIGN POLICY TOOL**

The rise of the digital age has profoundly altered the field of international relations and the conduct of foreign policy. Among the most significant changes is the growth of digital diplomacy, which has reshaped how countries engage with one another and communicate with global audiences. This paper examines how digital diplomacy influences contemporary foreign policy and international interactions (Lee, 2025). Digital diplomacy often referred to as *e-Diplomacy* or *Digiplomacy* signifies the transformative impact of the Internet and new information and communication technologies (ICTs) on the conduct of foreign policy and international relations. It moves beyond traditional often private diplomatic interactions to embrace a open interconnected and real-time engagement with a wider array of actors.

The digital diplomacy involves digital technologies and the internet to fulfill diplomatic goals. It includes various practices such as online communication, public diplomacy through digital platforms and efforts to address cyber security issues. The development of digital diplomacy is closely linked to the swift progress of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in recent decades. The concept of 'digital diplomacy' emerged in the early 2000s, when governments started to acknowledge the power of the internet and social media in shaping global public opinion and influencing international affairs (Ibid). Digital diplomacy has its roots in public diplomacy, a type of diplomatic engagement that has been

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portrayed as a tool employed by States to comprehend different cultures, perspectives, and behaviors; to establish and maintain relationships; and to shape opinions and inspire actions that support their national interests and values (Adesina, 2017). This study uses Hanson's (2012) definition of digital diplomacy, which refers to the application of the internet, modern Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to support the achievement of diplomatic aims and related objectives. Digital diplomacy is regarded as a vital instrument in advancing a country's foreign policy as it facilitates direct communication and engagement with international audiences.

India has never pursued political or territorial expansion, nor has it exploited the natural resources of other sovereign States. Instead, it believes in collaborative development that benefits its partners. This philosophy stems from India's long history of peaceful coexistence among diverse cultures, which has shaped its commitment to a multi-cultural society and support for a multipolar world order. India has been able to show that democratic values, respect to diversity, harmony, cooperation and dialogue are able to resolve the conflicts and divisions. These are the principles that constitute the well-established structure of the Indian approach to guaranteeing peace, stability and sustainable development.

Moreover, India is showing an example of predictability, transparency and progress when the world is in a state of indecisiveness. Its ability to sustain unity in the face of immense diversity makes India a world unifier and integrator. This is a strong Indian culture whose sages and philosophers had dreamed of a world in which every creature is happy, healthy and free of sufferings, as the ancient prayer says: "*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah, Sarve Santu Niramaya, Sarve Bhadrani Pashyant, Makashchid Dukh Bhag Bhavet*" - that is, all of them become happy, all of them are. And they have also indicated the way to reach this ideal and to achieve this dream (MEA, 2018).

The Indian foreign policy development especially in the digital democracy has been a multifaceted interaction between the local culture of diplomacy and the development of modern technology. In a country like India, which is still finding its place in the international arena, digital diplomacy is becoming a vital instrument, transforming the manner in which foreign policy is designed and implemented. There are several essential features of this transformation: Digital platforms enable real-time communication between diplomats and provide an opportunity to exchange information and negotiate rapid processes (Barman, 2024).. Social media can also promote the wider participation of the population in the discourse of foreign policy, making the diplomatic process more democratic and making international relations more transparent (Bute, 2018). The increased reliance on the digital world increases the exposure to cyber security breaches and information warfare, which explains why robust and holistic protective strategies are required (Barman, 2024). Although digital diplomacy has a lot of benefits, it also has pitfalls that should be avoided at all costs. This is one of the crucial factors that the foreign policy strategy of India needs to address as the balance between the old diplomatic traditions and the requirements of the digital era is an important matter.

Digital diplomacy has played a major role in the way India conducts its international negotiations, as it has involved employing digital tools and platforms in its international relations. This change has enabled India to improve its communication with the foreign policy, interact with the world communities, and respond to the changing environment of international relations.

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The Indian foreign policy in the digital democracy is a story of intricate interaction between the old time diplomacy techniques and the new power of social media. The foreign policy of India has shifted towards placing strategic partnerships and economic diplomacy under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, and digital platforms have transformed the political landscape and discussions. This two-foldity underscores the issues and prospects of digital democracy in the formation of the international position of India. The equation below shows how digital diplomacy influences the outcome of the foreign policy:

Foreign Policy Outcome =  $\beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{Digital Diplomacy} + \beta_2 \times \text{Traditional Diplomacy} + \epsilon$

- $\beta_0$  is the intercept or constant term
- $\beta_1$  is the coefficient representing the impact of digital diplomacy on foreign policy outcomes.
- $\beta_2$  is the coefficient that shows how traditional diplomacy influences foreign policy outcomes.
- $\epsilon$  is the error term (Lee, 2025).

In today's world, digital diplomacy has become an essential part of foreign policy. Both government and non-government players are competing for influence and power in a digital space that connects over 3 billion people, many of whom depend on their mobile phones for internet access. When used effectively, digital diplomacy can be a powerful and timely addition to traditional diplomatic efforts. It allows countries to promote their foreign policy goals, broaden their international reach, and connect with audiences who might never step foot in a physical embassy (Adesina, 2017). For India, digital diplomacy has notably shaped its approach to international negotiations by incorporating digital tools and platforms into its diplomatic strategies. This shift has enabled India to improve its foreign policy communication with global audiences and adapt to the changing dynamics of international relations.

### ***India's Digital Transformation and Global Outreach***

India's digital transformation has truly reshaped how we engage with democracy and connect globally, positioning the country as a digital frontrunner among emerging economies. Thanks to initiatives like Digital India, the government has developed a robust digital public infrastructure that includes platforms like Aadhaar for biometric identification, the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) for smooth digital transactions, and DigiLocker for secure document storage. These tools are empowering millions and promoting inclusive governance (Bandura, & Smutny, 2024). Not only do these innovations boost administrative efficiency and transparency within India's democratic framework, but they also act as strategic tools of soft power. By sharing its digital solutions with countries in the Global South, India is championing a model of techno-democracy that emphasizes accessibility and scalability. This outward-looking digital diplomacy resonates with India's democratic values, highlighting its potential to lead in global digital governance while reinforcing its image as a pro-development, rights-respecting state (Mehta, 2023). However, this positive narrative is accompanied by internal challenges such as data privacy issues, regulatory ambiguity, and unequal digital access, which raise important questions about how to balance innovation, inclusion, and accountability in a digitally empowered democracy (DD News, 2025).

### ***Digital Democracy as a Catalyst: Prospects and Perils***

The era of digital democracy marks a significant global shift where technologies like the internet, mobile platforms, social media, and artificial intelligence are more than just tools for governance; they actively foster democratic participation, spread information, promote policy transparency, and support global advocacy. This change moves us away from a focus on

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state-centric diplomacy to a more people-centered approach, encouraging greater public involvement through open government platforms and digital tools that enhance transparency and accountability. In this dynamic landscape, India's foreign policy needs to adapt to:

- The growing demand from citizens for global digital rights,
- The geopolitical rivalries surrounding tech governance,
- The manipulation of information and the spread of misinformation,
- The troubling trend of democratic backsliding in various regions, and
- The urgent need for inclusive and ethical global technology standards

The digital revolution has significantly reshaped how democratic societies operate, providing new avenues for civic engagement, government transparency, and responsiveness to policy needs. Digital democracy, which refers to the use of digital technologies to bolster democratic processes, brings both remarkable opportunities and serious challenges. While it encourages wider participation and more effective governance, it also raises important issues related to misinformation, data security, and the risk of digital exclusion (MacKinnon, 2012). This paper delves into the complex nature of digital democracy, examining both its potential benefits and its drawbacks in today's political environment.

### ***Prospects of Digital Democracy***

Digital platforms have opened up new avenues for citizens to engage in political discussions beyond the usual settings. Tools like social media, online petitions, and e-voting are making it easier for people to participate in decision-making, allowing for real-time conversations between citizens and policymakers (Loader & Mercea, 2011). This new way of participating has changed what it means to be a citizen, encouraging people to be more active and informed. E-governance and open data initiatives have boosted transparency by giving the public access to government documents, spending, and policy decisions. Blockchain technology, in particular, has been praised for its ability to combat corruption and ensure that public transactions are traceable (Tapscott & Tapscott, 2016). Digital democracy has the potential to empower groups that have often been left out, such as women, rural residents, and young people, by breaking down physical and bureaucratic barriers to participation. For instance, mobile governance (m-governance) initiatives in countries like India have improved service delivery in remote areas (Madon, 2009). Additionally, artificial intelligence (AI) and automated systems are helping to streamline administrative tasks, optimize how resources are allocated, and predict policy outcomes more effectively.

### ***Perils of Digital Democracy***

Social media algorithms have a knack for spreading misinformation and fueling political divides. Take the Cambridge Analytica scandal, for instance; it showed us just how personal data can be weaponized to sway election results (Isaak & Hanna, 2018). With the rise of deep fakes and bots, the authenticity of our digital conversations is under constant threat. Not everyone has the same access to digital tools and reliable internet, which creates a "digital divide" that leaves marginalized communities out of the democratic loop. This divide isn't just about technology; it also touches on socio-economic and educational factors (Norris, 2001).

As we shift democratic processes online, they become more susceptible to cyberattacks and data breaches. Elections and referendums are especially vulnerable to foreign meddling and hacking, which can erode public trust in democracy (Klimburg, 2017). Moreover, authoritarian regimes can exploit digital technologies to monitor citizens, curtail freedoms,

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and twist narratives. Countries like China have built extensive digital surveillance systems that prioritize political control over democratic empowerment (Deibert, 2020).

To truly tap into the transformative power of digital democracy while minimizing its risks, governments need to take a strategic and inclusive approach. A major focus should be on investing in digital literacy programs that equip citizens to critically evaluate online content, spot misinformation, and engage responsibly in digital spaces. It's equally crucial to enforce strong data protection laws that safeguard privacy and protect personal information from misuse. Closing the digital divide by expanding digital infrastructure and making access more affordable is vital to ensure everyone, especially marginalized communities, can participate equally.

It's crucial for governments to team up with tech companies to effectively manage harmful online content, all while striking a careful balance with our freedom of expression. Additionally, as we weave artificial intelligence into governance, we need to stick to principles like transparency, accountability, and ethical use to keep public trust and uphold democratic integrity (Floridi & Cowls, 2019). By focusing on these important safeguards, we can ensure that digital innovation aligns with democratic values in this fast-changing tech landscape. Digital democracy has the power to transform governance in the 21st century, but without the right regulatory frameworks and inclusive policies, it could end up undermining the very principles it aims to promote. A thoughtful and ethical approach is vital for creating a democratic digital future where technology benefits all citizens fairly and responsibly.

### **INDIA'S DEMOCRATIC ETHOS IN FOREIGN POLICY**

The principles of non-alignment, strategic autonomy, peaceful coexistence, and democratic values have long been the cornerstones of India's foreign policy. In today's digital democracy era, these principles are more relevant than ever. While India firmly upholds democratic values, it doesn't aim to impose them on others. Instead, it engages pragmatically with countries, regardless of their political systems, focusing on cooperation with the regimes that are already in place (ORF, 2020). As India navigates the global landscape in this digital age, its approach is increasingly defined by three strategic orientations.

First, India is stepping up as a normative leader, advocating for democracy, pluralism, and open societies as essential elements of global digital governance. This ambition reflects India's desire to influence the international digital order in a way that aligns with its constitutional values (Chaudhuri, 2023). This commitment is evident in India's diplomatic initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive and transparent multilateralism, particularly within institutions like the United Nations and BRICS, where it champions equity, accountability, and reform. Second, India is actively engaging in strategic digital partnerships with like-minded democracies through platforms such as the Quad and the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI), all in an effort to counterbalance the rising influence of digital authoritarian regimes (Mehta, 2022).

India is making strides in digital diplomacy for its citizens by utilizing platforms like *MEAIIndia* and *MyGov*. This approach aims to boost transparency, encourage public participation, and promote inclusivity in foreign policy processes. In essence, it's about democratizing diplomacy and nurturing digital ecosystems both at home and on the global stage (Singh, 2021). By doing this, India's foreign policy blends a sense of realism with democratic ideals, positioning the country as a significant player in creating a more balanced and principled global order.

## RESHAPING DIGITAL TOOLS IN INDIAN DIPLOMACY

Digital tools have really changed the way Indian diplomacy operates and reaches out, moving away from the old, State-centric methods to more lively, tech-driven interactions. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has done a great job using platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to share India's foreign policy views, react to global events, and connect with both local and international audiences in real time (Chatterjee, 2021). Additionally, initiatives like the e-Visa system, the *MEAIndia* mobile app, and Virtual Embassies have made consular affairs more transparent, improved service delivery, and boosted citizen engagement, leading to a more people-focused approach in diplomacy (Gupta, 2022). India's involvement in global digital forums, such as the Global Digital Health Partnership and the Digital Economy Working Group under G20, shows how digital tools are now playing both strategic and normative roles in foreign policy. By weaving digital technologies into its diplomatic strategies, India is not just enhancing its operational efficiency but also positioning itself as a tech-savvy and globally responsible player (Saran, 2023).

India has embraced digital tools across multiple dimensions of its foreign policy apparatus:

- *Digital Public Diplomacy*

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has made extensive use of digital platforms, from Twitter diplomacy and virtual summits to real-time citizen services via apps and portals. Indian embassies now use social media to provide consular services, disaster response updates, and engage with Diaspora communities. India's COVID-19 diplomacy (through *Vaccine Maitri*) was amplified via digital campaigns showcasing solidarity and humanitarian outreach.

- *E-Governance Diplomacy*

India's promotion of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) abroad, including Aadhaar, UPI, and DigiLocker-like platforms signals a diplomatic strategy rooted in tech-for-good. Initiatives like India Stack for the World are positioned as democratic alternatives to centralized, surveillance-based models offered by authoritarian regimes. India promotes open-source, interoperable and citizen-centric technologies, enabling other democracies to adopt similar frameworks. In times of conflict or humanitarian need, Indian missions utilise digital tools for real-time coordination, evacuation efforts (e.g., Operation Ganga in Ukraine) and reputation management in the digital space.

**Opportunities in the Digital Age:** The digital age presents a transformative opportunity for nations to redefine diplomacy, governance, and global engagement. For India, digital technologies serve as a powerful tool to bridge developmental gaps, enhance transparency and strengthen its global presence.

- *Enhanced Political Participation*

Digital platforms have enabled citizens, particularly youth to engage in democratic processes. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become arenas for political discourse, activism and mobilization. Initiatives like *MyGov*, an online platform launched by the Government of India, allow citizens to share their opinions on government policies and initiatives.

- *E-Governance and Transparency*

Digital technology has enhanced transparency and efficiency in governance. Schemes like *Digital India*, *Aadhaar-enabled services* and the use of mobile apps for public grievance redressal have improved the delivery of government services and made bureaucratic systems more accountable. Real-time data on government portals has also enabled better monitoring of public schemes.

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- *Digital Voting Innovations*

Although India still conducts elections using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), discussions around *remote e-voting* and the use of *block chain* technology are gaining momentum. These advancements can further ease voting access especially for citizens residing outside their registered constituencies or the country.

- *Empowered Citizen Journalism*

The rise of digital platforms has given a voice to marginalized communities and grassroots movements. Independent news blogs, YouTube channels and podcasts are increasingly holding authorities accountable and bringing regional issues to the national stage thereby deepening democratic engagement.

### CHALLENGES FOR INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN A DIGITAL DEMOCRATIC WORLD

Despite its leadership potential India faces a set of internal and external challenges: *Information Warfare and Misinformation*: Democracies are increasingly targeted by hostile actors spreading misinformation and fake news. India must invest in digital resilience, fact-checking alliances, and cross-border cyber norms. During elections, social media platforms are often weaponised to polarise voters and manipulate public opinion. The lack of stringent fact-checking mechanisms and the algorithmic amplification of sensational content can subvert democratic discourse.

- *Privacy and Surveillance*

The increased reliance on digital technologies have raised questions about the protection of personal data. The use of facial recognition, digital tracking, and surveillance technologies by the State without robust legal safeguards can infringe on individual privacy and democratic freedoms. The delay in enacting a comprehensive data protection law has further compounded this issue. Tensions between freedom of expression and national security, especially around social media regulation must be navigated carefully. India's global image as a digital democracy hinges on maintaining trust in its own digital laws and institutions.

- *Strengthening Digital Governance*

While India promotes data sovereignty, it must avoid slipping into isolationism or technonationalism that contradicts its democratic ethos. Striking a balance between global digital interdependence and national interests remains a delicate task. There is a pressing need for comprehensive legislation to address data protection and cyber threats. The pending Personal Data Protection Bill could empower a Data Protection Authority, but its efficacy remains uncertain. The Election Commission's digital adaptation has faced digital security vulnerabilities and questions over impartiality.

- *Bridging the Digital Divide*

As India promotes digital democracy abroad, it must also address domestic disparities in internet access, digital literacy, and infrastructure, ensuring its digital diplomacy is credible and inclusive. While India has made remarkable strides in internet penetration, significant sections of the population in rural and remote areas remain digitally excluded. According to 2023 report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), over 40% of Indians still lack access to the internet, raising concerns about unequal participation in digital democracy. India reinforces election technology abroad (e.g., EVMs, indelible ink), offering a model connecting democracy with development. The country could leverage its digital public good expertise (like Aadhaar, UPI) in foreign policy cooperation, shaping a Global South-oriented digital governance narrative.

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- *Cybersecurity and Electoral Integrity*

As elections become increasingly digitized, safeguarding electoral integrity from cyber attacks and foreign interference is critical. Threats of hacking, data leaks or digital voter manipulation highlight the need for robust cybersecurity infrastructure in democratic institutions.

### WAY FORWARD

As the digital landscape becomes a vital space for global influence, the push for a democratic digital world order has become a key priority. This vision emphasizes the need for openness, inclusivity, transparency, and a commitment to human rights in how we govern digital technologies. India, with its lively democracy and expanding digital infrastructure, is in a great position to spearhead this change. By championing fair access to digital resources, data sovereignty, and responsible innovation, India can help build a digital framework that stands against authoritarianism and surveillance-driven models.

Creating such an order will require teamwork among democracies that share similar values, ensuring that emerging technologies like blockchain, artificial intelligence, and digital finance are guided by ethical standards and public accountability. Forums like the Quad, G20, and the Global Digital Public Infrastructure Alliance (GDPIA) provide India with a strong platform to influence global digital standards that reflect democratic principles. At the same time, India needs to focus on building its own capabilities, enhancing digital literacy, and strengthening cybersecurity to become a credible example for others. The path ahead involves finding a balance between innovation and rights, connectivity and sovereignty, as well as national interests and the greater good, ensuring that the digital future is open, fair, and fundamentally democratic. India's foreign policy should aim to shape the future of digital democracy through these strategic avenues:

- Championing the Democratic Tech Governance
- Strengthening South-South Digital Cooperation
- Creating Coalitions of Digital Democracies
- Investing in Cyber Diplomacy Talent

### CONCLUSION: LOOKING AHEAD FOR DIGITAL INDIA

In this age of digital democracy, India finds itself at a pivotal moment, ready to reshape the conversation around what digital democracy means. No longer just a side note in its strategic vision, India's foreign policy in the digital realm has taken center stage. With a robust democratic foundation, India is in a unique position to develop a foreign policy that not only defends digital rights but also promotes fair access to technology and stands against authoritarian digital regimes. The effectiveness of India's digital diplomacy will hinge not just on forming strategic alliances but also on its commitment to practice what it preaches, ensuring that its domestic digital policies reflect the democratic values it advocates internationally. As the world steps into a time where data influences elections and screens dictate sovereignty, India's journey as a digital democracy can serve as both an inspiring and transformative example of how to blend digital innovation with democratic inclusion on a global scale. By fostering the right partnerships, maintaining policy consistency, and striving for technological independence, India can protect its national interests while leading the way in a new model of tech-driven global cooperation grounded in democracy, development, and digital sovereignty.

In today's world, India's digital democracy is making a significant impact on its foreign policy, bringing both exciting opportunities and some democratic challenges. The growth of

digital infrastructure and diplomacy is boosting India's global presence, but issues like regulatory practices and internet shutdowns can tarnish its democratic reputation. To maintain its soft power and leadership role, India needs to enhance rights-based digital governance, engage in balanced international relations, and ensure that its digital policies reflect democratic values. Digital technology has the power to enrich Indian democracy by making it more participatory, transparent, and responsive. However, these advantages can only be fully realized if the challenges that come with them are tackled promptly and thoughtfully. Closing the digital divide, protecting data privacy, fighting misinformation, and regulating digital platforms are crucial steps toward building a strong digital democracy. As India navigates the complexities of the digital age, it must find a careful balance between fostering innovation and implementing regulations to protect its democratic principles.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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