



AMERICAN  
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INITIATIVE

# A Global Digital Strategy For America

A Roadmap to Build Back a More Inclusive Economy,  
Protect Democracy and Meet the China Challenge

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# Executive Summary

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The digital revolution is permeating all aspects of society, remaking the way people work and learn, changing the economic landscape, and altering America's relationships with the rest of the world. While this revolution has generated many benefits throughout society, the rapid change, accelerated by the global COVID-19 pandemic, has also created economic disruption, devastating many in the middle and working classes and posing challenges to American democracy. With the right policies, however, this revolution holds the potential to create a more inclusive and growing American economy with good American jobs, establish digital governance to protect democracy, support inclusive growth in developing countries, and position the United States (U.S.) as a global digital leader.

That is why the American Leadership Initiative (ALI) has convened and consulted with experts and key stakeholders from think tanks, academia, civil society, and business, together with elected officials, to develop a digital policy roadmap for the Biden Administration and Congress. This report represents a culmination of that work.

To reap the benefits of the digital economy, and avoid its pitfalls, America must launch a **Global Digital Strategy**, involving a whole of government approach, and including participation of business and labor representatives, and civil society stakeholders. Such a strategy should focus on two interrelated pillars: **Investing in America**, ensuring equal access to technology to close the digital divide and promoting policies to ensure American competitiveness; and **Leading Globally**, working with allies to create a global digital future that is open, transparent, and democratic.

America's global digital leadership requires citizens who have equal access to broadband, digital technologies, training, and education, so that they can fill the jobs of today and tomorrow, actions made more urgent by the unequal social and economic impacts of the pandemic.

**Investing in America** must therefore start with a comprehensive look at how to improve access to digital training at all levels, from grade school through community college and apprenticeships, to older workers who need to upskill for new jobs. It must include providing access to digital devices and broadband for all citizens and ensure that this training and technology is accessible to citizens living in rural America, African Americans, Hispanics, and other underserved communities.

To ensure American workers are gaining the right digital skills necessary to succeed in the future economy, government, corporate and labor partners must come to the table to significantly bolster education and training programs in new ways. By developing an inclusive digital agenda, including universal access to broadband, as well as freeing up new spectrum and tackling net neutrality, the new Administration can shift the U.S. economy towards greater income equality and prepare American workers to compete globally in an increasingly digital world.

The Biden Administration should also move to establish an Office of Global Digital Policy in the Executive Office of the President. This new office would coordinate digital policies, starting with the imperative of doubling U.S. federal investment in research and development; advancing a global digital governance agenda that allows citizens to safely use the internet; identifying a limited group of technologies for targeted support; encouraging policies that foster innovation, protect key technologies, promote exports; and supporting immigration reform, including provisions designed to attract and keep the best talent from abroad.

These efforts must be combined with a multipronged series of investment and export controls to protect key U.S. technologies and a Digital Marshall Plan to provide financing for U.S. technology companies. This financing would allow companies to compete on a level playing field with China's technology companies that receive government subsidized financing, not just to provide fair commercial competition, but to

ensure that developing countries can purchase internet infrastructure consistent with an open, accountable, and democratic internet, as opposed to Chinese supplied infrastructure, which supports an autocratic internet, allowing government monitoring and censorship.

With strong, inclusive domestic policies and funding, America and its workers will be positioned to compete and **Lead Globally**. To achieve such global leadership, the Biden Administration must discard the unilateral approach of the Trump Administration and establish an alliance with other liberal democracies that have advanced technology industries. These technology-driven democracies, the “T-10,” should work together to create a global governance agenda, based on shared values. This alliance should create a framework that will allow businesses, civil society, and citizens access to an internet that is open, democratic, and safe, as well as form a template for negotiating digital agreements with other countries, understanding that other countries may need to phase in or adapt parts of the agenda.

Finally, the U.S. must work with its allies to develop a coordinated approach to China, applying joint pressure to eliminate the subsidies and other non-market practices it uses to give its technology companies an unfair advantage, while jointly coordinating the protection of technologies vital to national security. This leadership will be important in safeguarding American interests and a democratic internet, especially when faced with a rising China, which is promoting an autocratic internet as an export and political strategy.

With the T-10 framework in place, the U.S. should negotiate additional digital arrangements. The next step should be the negotiation of a Pacific Digital Agreement, taking advantage of the digital agreements many of these countries have already negotiated among themselves. This agreement would also be a way for the U.S. to reassert its engagement in Asia, a region that has sorely felt the U.S. absence during the past four years.

A comprehensive digital strategy is broad and complex, touching on almost every aspect of the economy and people's lives. New technologies offer the promise of solving many of the world's challenges but also raise new issues, like increasing economic inequality, managing the impact of violent and false narratives on social media, and the opportunity to abuse technologies like facial recognition. Our list of recommendations detailed in this report is not exhaustive, but rather provides a policy scaffolding – the key elements that must be in place for the U.S. to harness digital technologies to their best advantage, creating a more inclusive and growing economy at home and abroad, and a safer, more democratic world.

## **About the American Leadership Initiative**

The American Leadership Initiative (ALI) is working with elected officials and other stakeholders to develop a 21st century vision and policy agenda for American global leadership, based on American interests and shared values. ALI's policy work is focused on five pillars: advancing inclusive and sustainable growth at home and abroad, pursuing smart trade policies, leading on climate, meeting the China challenge, and promoting democracy, human rights, and rule of law.

## **About the Authors**

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Dr. Orit Frenkel is the CEO and co-founder of the American Leadership Initiative. She has 39 years of experience working on Asia, trade, and foreign policy issues. Prior to founding ALI, Orit was a senior executive with General Electric Company for 26 years. In that position, she supported GE's international public policy initiatives, international sales, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. This included addressing the policy and business challenges posed by China, developing rules for digital trade, and policies to support sales of environmentally friendly goods.

Dr. Frenkel started her career in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative where she was the Director for Trade in High Technology Products and Deputy Director for Trade with Japan, and spent a year working for Congressman Lee Hamilton during his time as Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

She is the author of numerous published articles on trade and foreign policy issues, as well as a book on the negotiation of the U.S.-Israel Free Trade Area. She is an Adjunct Fellow with the Center on Strategic and International Studies, a member of APCO's International Advisory Committee, and has served on the board of numerous trade associations and on Department of Commerce and State Advisory panels.

Ms. Frenkel received a Ph.D. in International Economics from The Johns Hopkins University, an M.P.P. from the University of Michigan, and a B.A. in Economics with honors from University of Maryland.

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She has held roles in government, trade associations, and non-profit settings for over two decades, including at the U.S. Department of Commerce, the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, and the Information Technology Industry Council. Ms. Karnak earned her B.A. from the Ohio State University, and her M.A. in international affairs, with language proficiency certification in Mandarin and Spanish, from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

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