

The internet of the majority is produced by the minority

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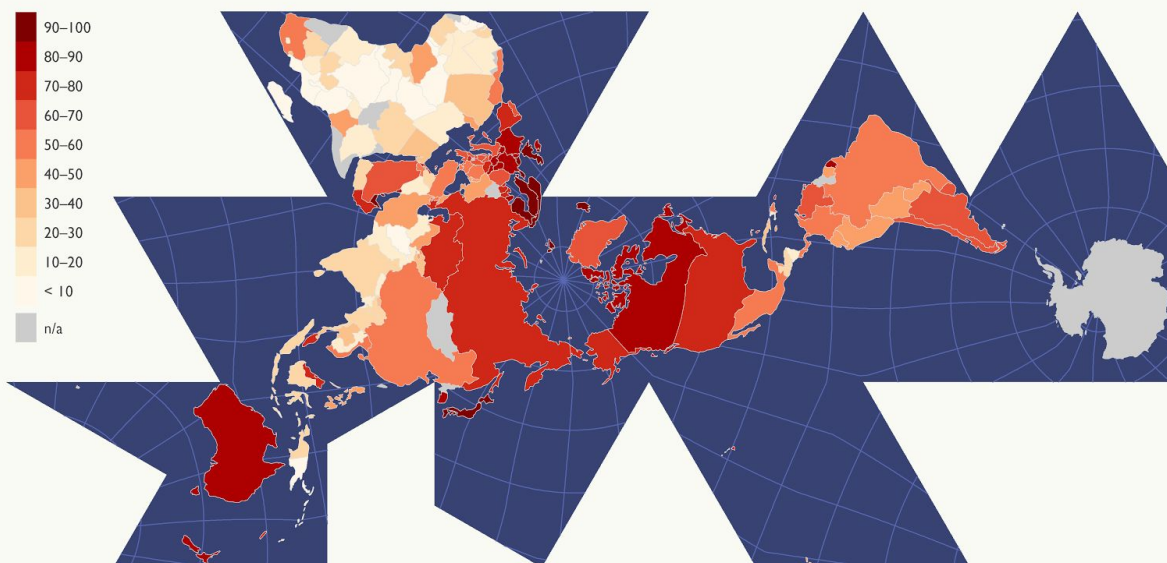
Recently this year, we passed an important milestone in the history of human connectivity. Somebody used the internet for the first time, and that person joined an internet in which those online now [make up the majority](#) of the world's population.

This significant milestone in the progress of human connectivity has largely gone unnoticed, but it is important to mark for many more reasons than simply as a statistical phenomenon.

North American and European internet users together now make only about a quarter of the world's users. Furthermore, while places like the US and the UK have almost reached internet saturation, countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are home to billions more users that [will come online in the next few years](#).

Access to the Internet

Internet penetration 2015, in percent



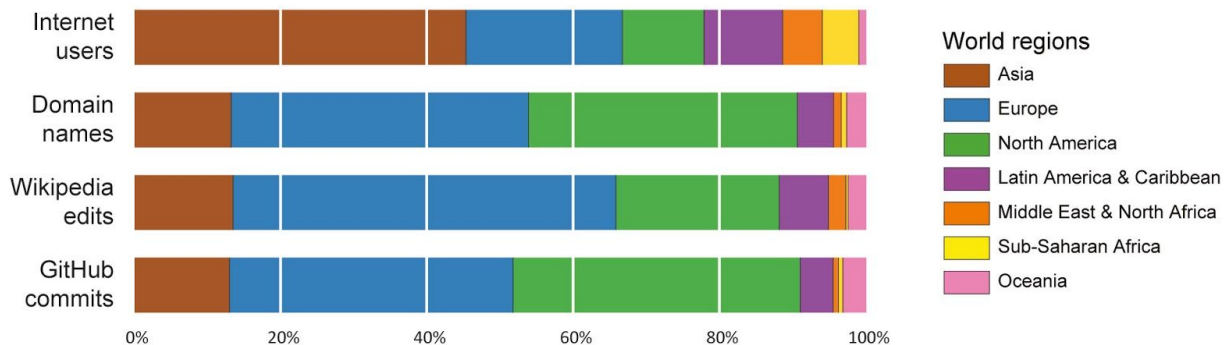
Internet penetration is the proportion of individuals who have used the internet in the last 12 months.

CC-BY-NC Ralph Straumann, @rastrau, & Mark Graham, @geoplace
Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, UK

Data sources: World Bank, Natural Earth
Geonet project: <http://geonet.ox.ac.uk>

The networking of humanity is thus no longer just confined to a few economically prosperous parts of the world. For the first time in history, we are creating a truly global and accessible communication network.

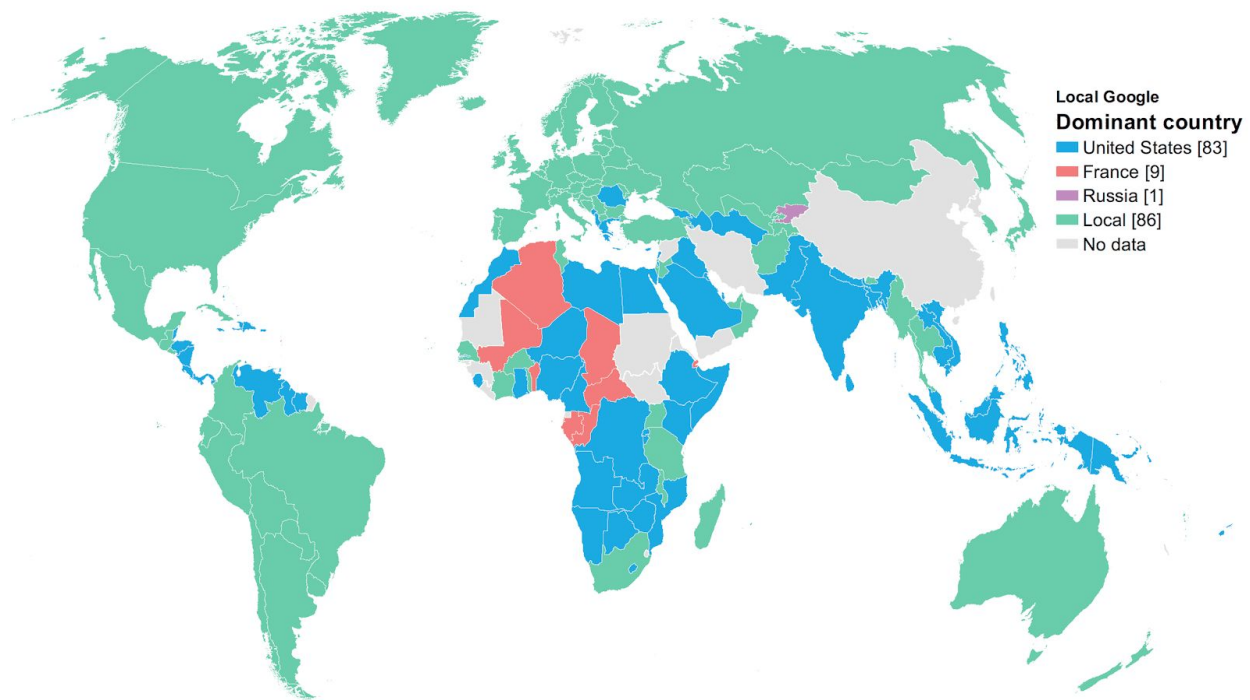
However, while access to the internet is quickly being democratised, research that we have done through the [Geonet Project at the Oxford Internet Institute](#) shows that content on it remains heavily skewed towards rich, Western countries.



We see that all of Sub-Saharan Africa combined, despite having 10% of the world's internet users, [registers only 0.7% of the world's domain names](#) (a good proxy for how much web content is produced) and 0.5% of the world's commits to Github (a proxy for how much computer code people write and share in a place). France alone produces 5.7 times more Github commits and 3.4 times more domain registrations than all Sub-Saharan African countries put together.

The skewed geography and gender of Wikipedia edits is perhaps even more concerning. [Research shows](#) that the vast majority of content on Wikipedia written about most African countries is written by (primarily male) editors in Europe or North America. Wikipedia is both one of the most used websites in the world and an important data source for countless other platforms and services.

20% of the world or less, shapes our [understanding of 80% of the world](#), through the filters of things like domain names and Wikipedia articles. This causes an amplification of geographical and gendered biases, including on [search engines like Google](#). If you are using Google to search for local information in Belgium, Canada, or Australia, you will be served up primarily locally produced content.



But if you're in Sierra Leone, Pakistan, or Indonesia, looking for local content through the lens of Google or Wikipedia, almost all local digital knowledge is produced by outsiders. If you're a Nigerian woman looking at the internet, there are hardly any [Wikipedia biographies](#) of the famous women you read about in your national newspaper. You might speak Mandarin, Bengali, or Arabic, all of which are in the top [10 most spoken languages of the world](#). But there are only [52,000 articles](#) in the Bengali Wikipedia (a language spoken by 237 million), while the Dutch Wikipedia has [nearly 2 million](#) articles (spoken by 28 million).

In a world already riven by stereotype and discrimination, the internet should be challenging the biases of our physical world, not deepening them. In fact, the internet could well serve as the digital space that reflects and produces the richness of our multiple forms of knowledge, through a combination of text, voice, and visuals. As Google projected a few years ago, the world has nearly [130 million books in at least 480 languages](#). Yet in a world of nearly 7000 languages and dialects, [we estimate that only about 7% of our languages](#) are in published material. We need to do much more to capture the oral knowledge of our past and present.

So how do we make the internet look more like the world we live in? Those of us who make up most of the world need to bring our information and knowledge online, and all of us - wherever we are from - need to help make it happen. Over the last few years, a number of individuals, groups, and campaigns have been working to make the internet more diverse and plural. [Wikimujeres](#) (and similar initiatives in different languages) work on increasing the number of women's biographies from Latin America on the Spanish Wikipedia. [Wiki Loves Africa](#) expands the number of high quality images from African countries, and [Afrocrowd](#) works to create and

improve information on black culture and history on Wikipedia. Organisations like the [Association of Progressive Communications](#) focus on women's rights and knowledge in internet and telecommunications policies.

[Whose Knowledge?](#) is a global, multi-lingual campaign that works with these groups and beyond, to centre the histories and knowledge of the majority of the world that is under-represented on the internet. For instance, in 2016 when we began, we worked with scholars from the Kumeyaay Native American community of southern California, on the Wikipedia article about the [California Gold Rush](#), to reflect its deeply negative impact on Native American communities. In April 2017, with our partners [Equality Labs](#), we held a Wikipedia editing session to include information about the 350 million strong Dalit community, and wrote about inspirations like [Grace Banu](#) - the first transgender Dalit person to be admitted into an engineering college in Tamil Nadu. At the same time, we are working with communities like the Dalit and the Kumeyaay to archive their oral knowledge and histories.

Google and other key mediators of information should have a responsibility to ensure that communities around the world are not flooded with foreign content, and that the internet begins to resemble the network for billions that it is meant to be. But we - as users - also have a responsibility to question the perspectives presented to us by the Googles and the Wikipedias of the world, and perhaps also to change them: to edit, to create, and to build the internet we want to see.

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