

CSIS Global Dialogue
Breakout 2: Trade & Investment Issues in the Digital Era
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Digital ASEAN: Six Questions/Hypotheses

1. Splintering is already a lived-in and growing reality, not impending threat (e.g. dark web, national firewalls, IPRs). Complete seamlessness does not jive with political, social & security realities of nation states (digital sovereignty). Rapidly advancing & converging technologies (e.g. 4IR, 5G, AI, quantum computing) are likely to compound this.
2. A Single Speed Digital ASEAN hindered by different e-readiness capabilities, interests, ambitions, & etc. Not problematic if reasonable core digital infrastructure is available so that governments can choose to regulate (or truncate), pick winners & leapfrog etc. based on knowledge, needs, ambitions and resources.
3. Biggest challenge for Digital ASEAN are voluntary choices by commercial proprietary technology providers and forced choices by governments in a world of already non-net neutral policies. It is not obvious (to me) how these issues will be dealt with.

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5. Digital space also bifurcating – fintech, retail platforms, mobile money, payment systems, P2P lending, shared services & online media advancing rapidly—for some, not others. Others lagging due to apathy, knowledge, interest and MSME B2B models. No logical reason to expect otherwise.
6. ASEAN Work Programme on Electronic Commerce (2017-2025) & Digital Integration Framework Action Plan (2019-2025) are first steps but not sufficient to resolve multi-speed ASEAN. More specific and granular collective approaches by *informed* policymakers who are fully engaged with private sector (including extra-ASEAN) are required.
7. Digital ASEAN should also collectively address *the* issues of the time that can undermine its members, i.e. cryptocurrencies, misuse, information gathering and security. Insistence on data localization is a public policy decision and governments must be prepared to bear the consequences.