

Why Digital Trade Is Different

Commitments in FTAs and Tariff Deals Worldwide

15 May 2026

Tommaso Giardini

Associate Director, Digital Policy Alert

Singapore Economic Roundtable

Special Session on Digital Trade

Regulatory diversity risks fragmenting the digital economy.

Mushrooming regulation

The body of policy grows due to new technologies and political salience.

Cross-border spillovers

Domestic policy affects the digital economy across borders.

Insufficient coordination

Policymakers are in blind flight due to inexistent standards and vocabulary.

Regulatory Activity

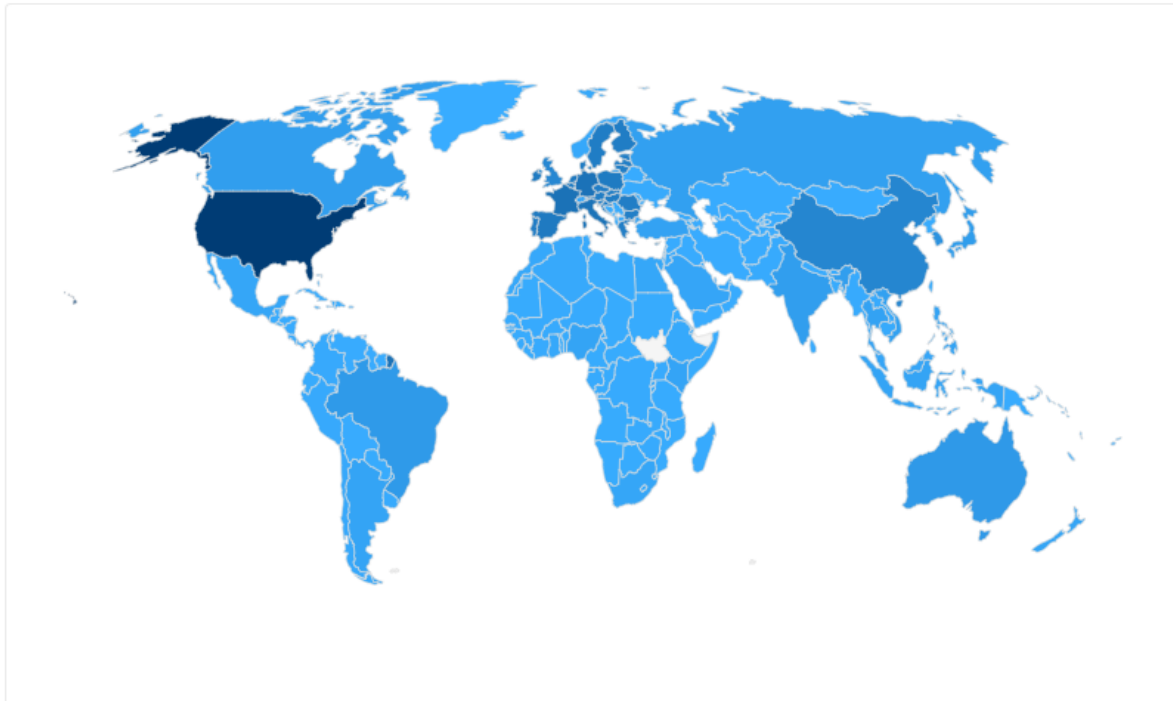
23343 events advancing 12838 policy or regulatory changes:

Most active jurisdictions

Number of policy changes


Graph  Table 

Excel  CSV 



Most active policy areas

Number of policy changes

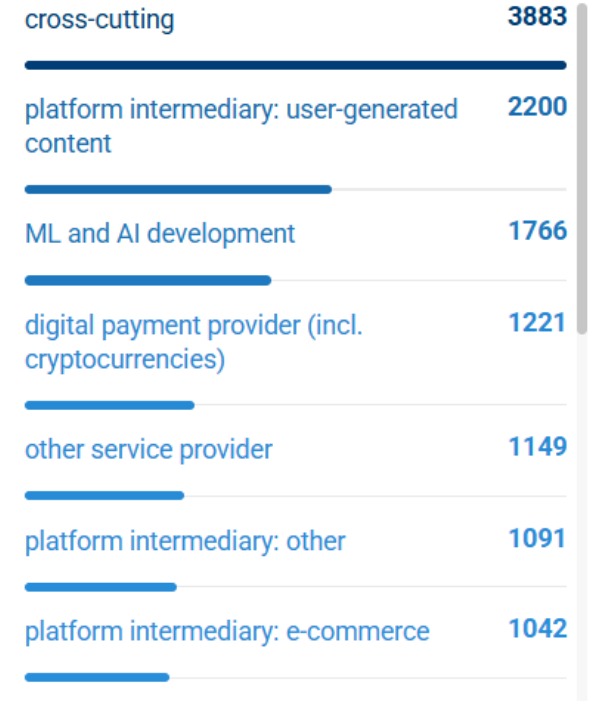
Excel  CSV 



Targeted economic activity

Number of policy changes

Excel  CSV 



hinrich foundation
advancing sustainable global trade

 Digital Policy Alert

MARCH 2026

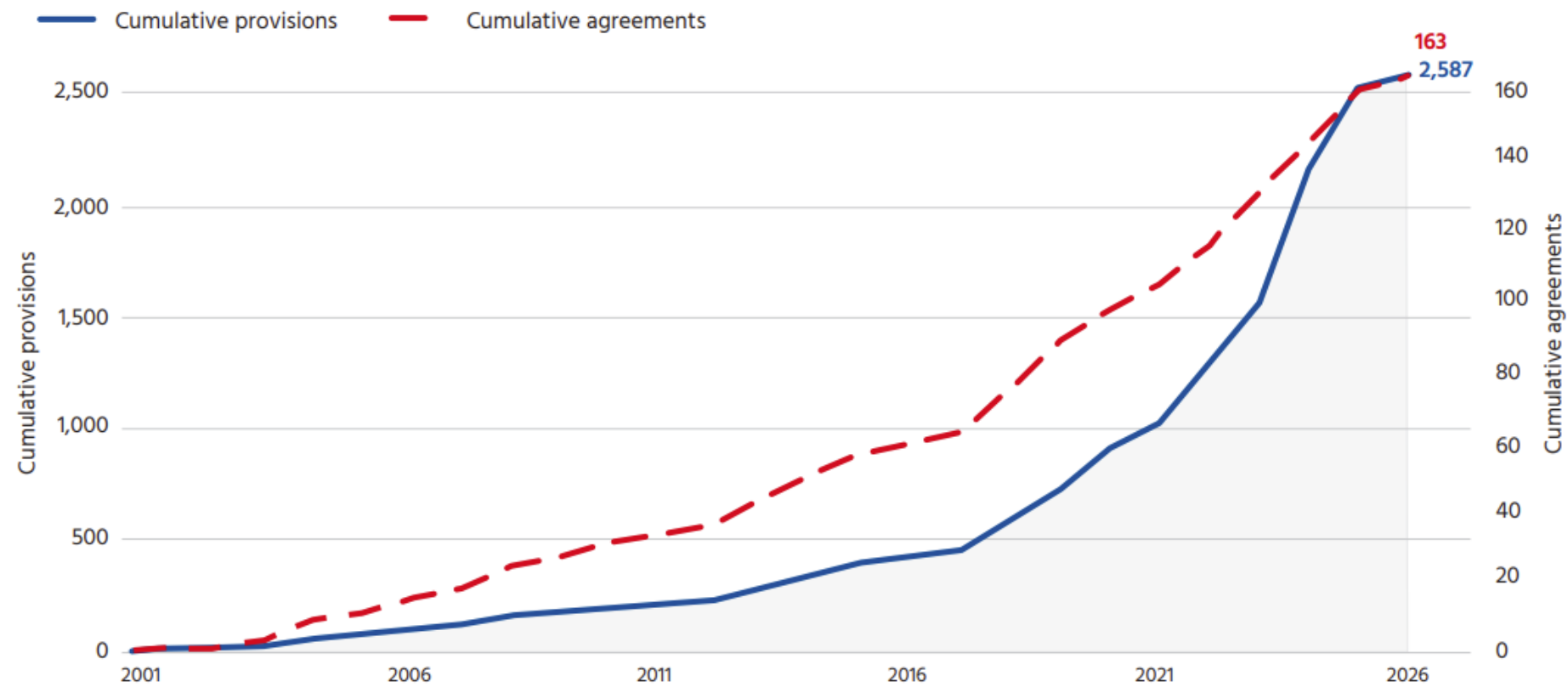
Why Digital Is Different: Making Digital Trade Policy for the 21st Century

BY TOMMASO GIARDINI AND VLADISLAV ALIFIROV

Agreements and Provisions

Figure 1 – The acceleration of digital trade

Cumulative provisions and agreements, 2001–2026

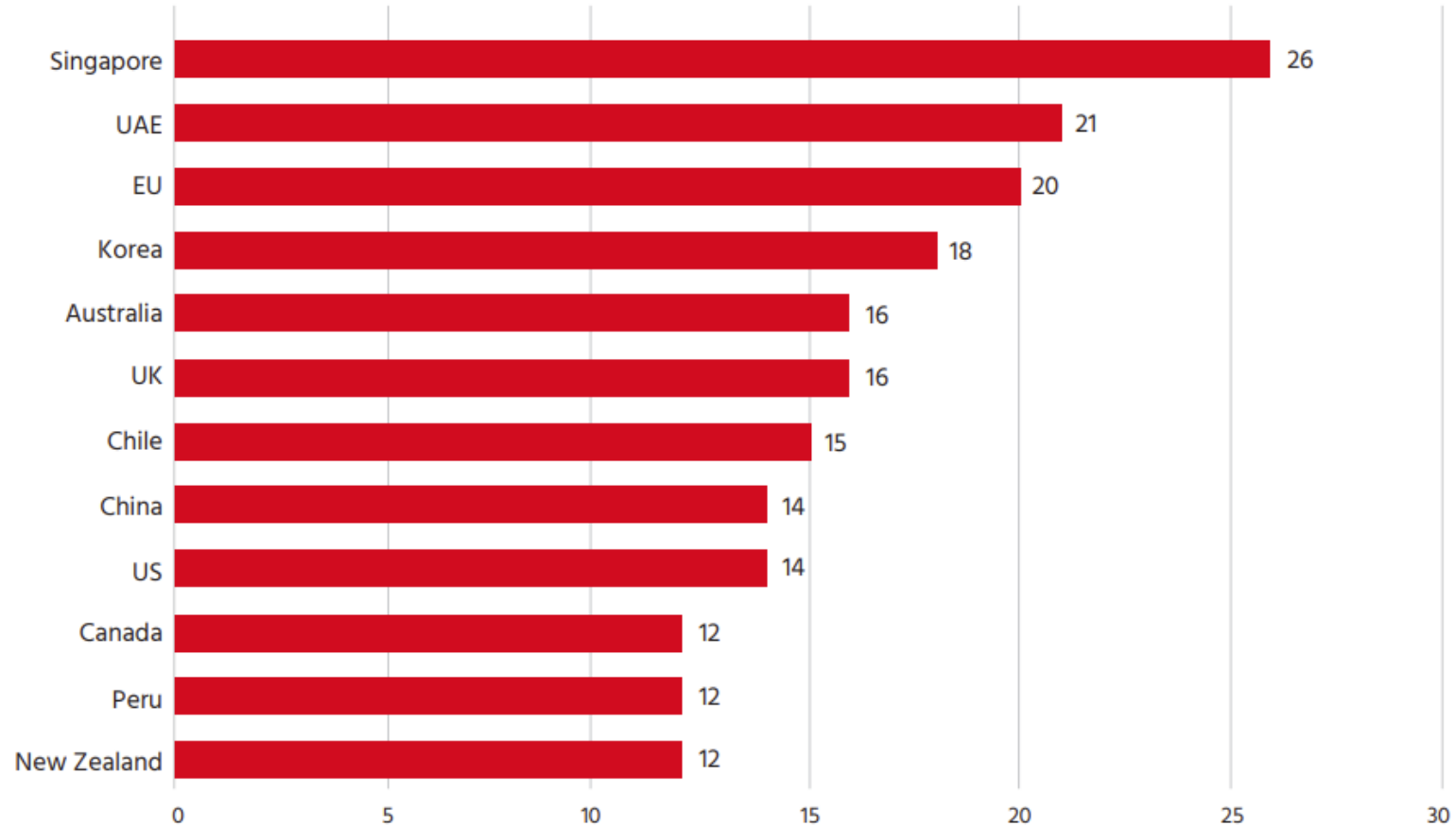


Source: Digital Policy Alert

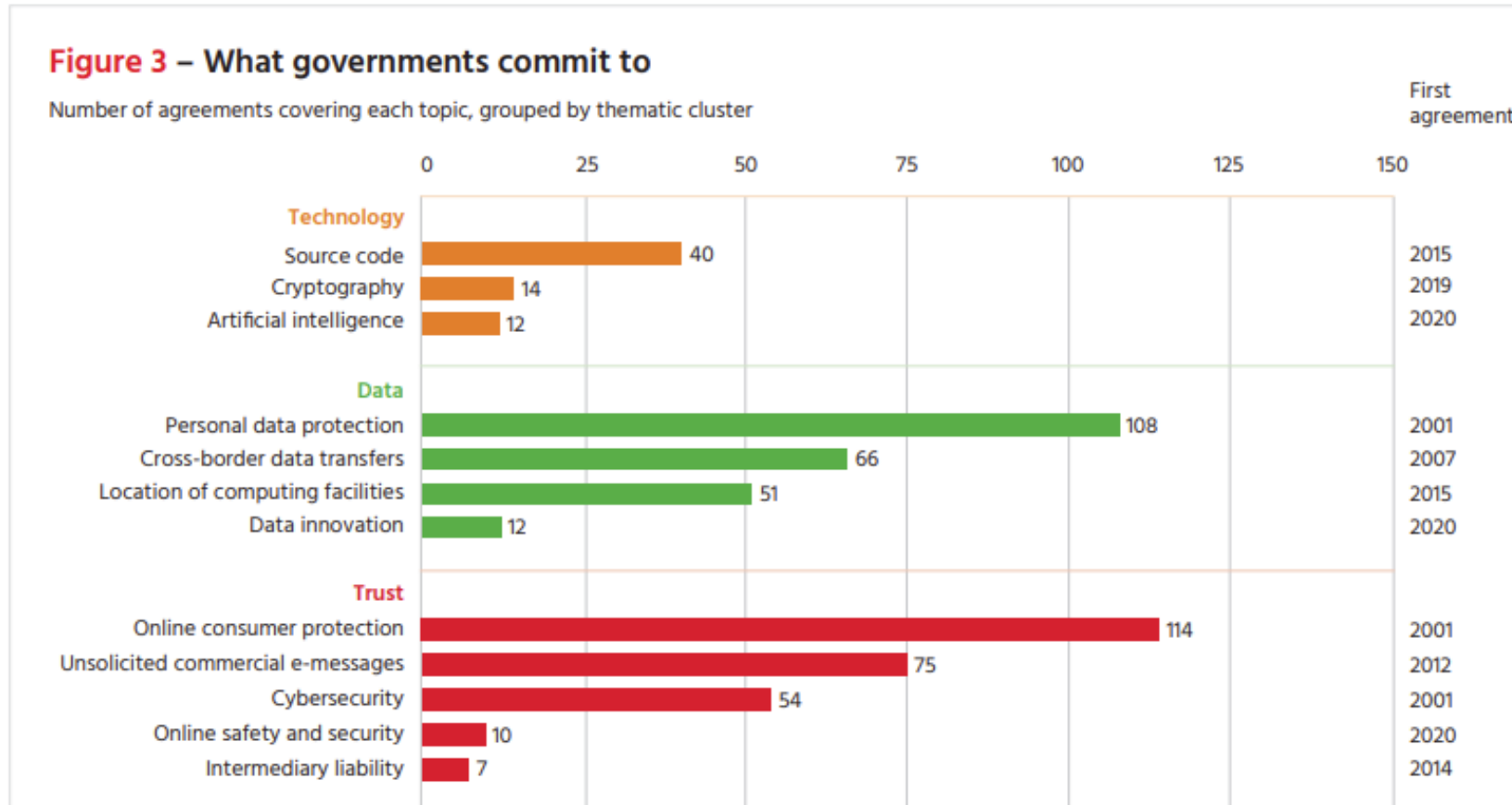
Jurisdictions

Figure 2 – Principal negotiators

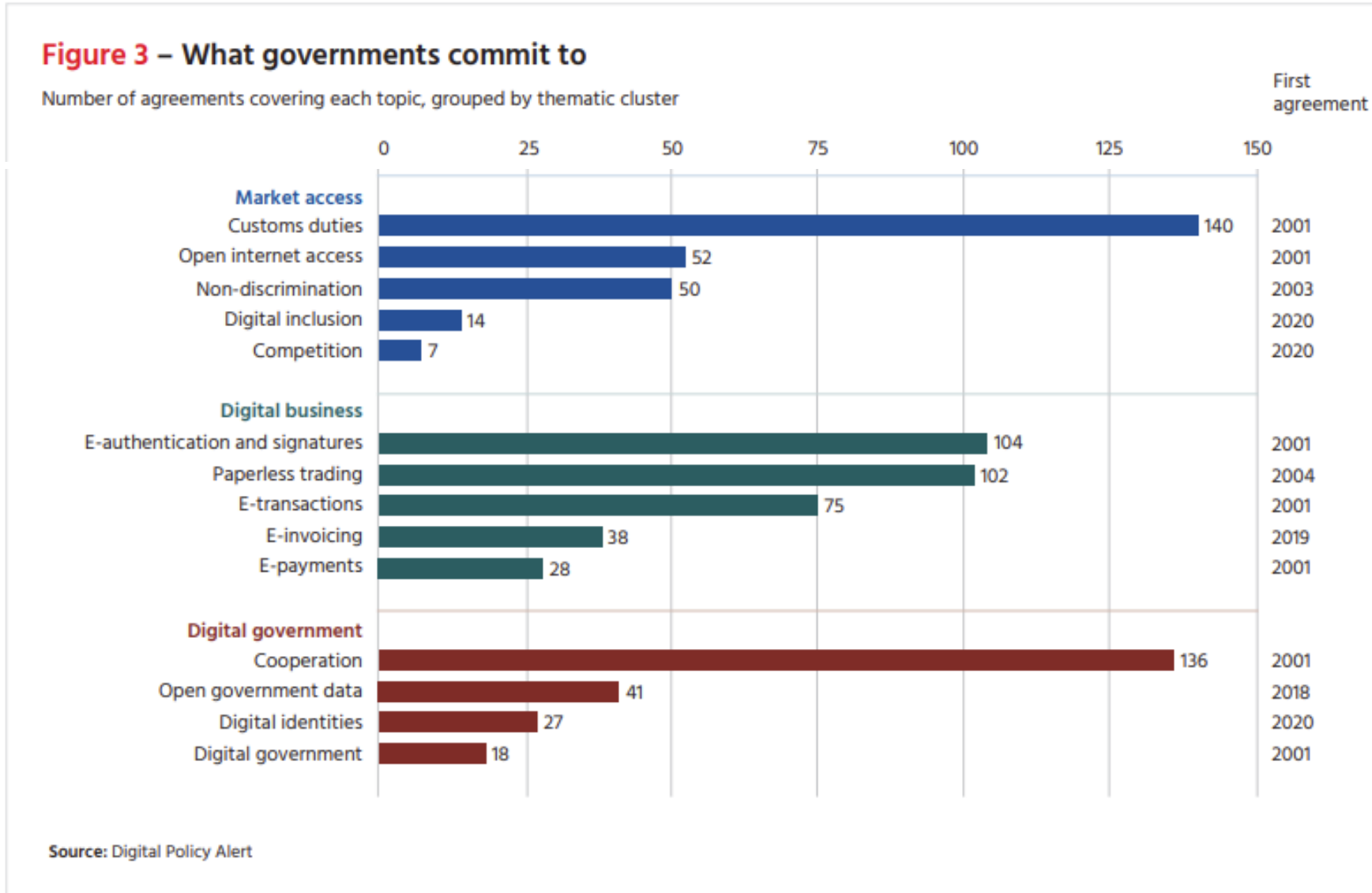
Agreements by jurisdiction



Commitments I



Commitments II



High-Level Findings

1. Agreements are increasingly broad.
2. Commitments grow binding with time.
3. Most governments participate through regional, not bilateral, frameworks.
4. The centre of gravity has shifted away from the United States.

Tariff Deals

| | | Taxation | Data Flows | Customs duties | Moratorium | Non-discrim. | Cybersecurity | Market entry |
|---------------|--|-------------|-------------|----------------|--|-------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| finalised | Argentina | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ |
| | Bangladesh* | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ |
| | Cambodia° | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ |
| | Chinese Taipei" | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ |
| | Ecuador | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ |
| | El Salvador | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ |
| | Guatemala | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ |
| | Indonesia | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ |
| Malaysia* | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | █ | |
| not finalised | European Union | | | █ intention | | | | |
| | India | | | | | █ | | |
| | North Macedonia | █ | | | █ | | | |
| | Republic of Korea | | █ | | █ | █ | | |
| | Switzerland+LI | █ intention | █ intention | █ intention | █ intention | | | |
| | Thailand | █ | | | █ | █ | | |
| | | | | | | █ joint statement | █ final | |
| | *joint statement and final agreement released simultaneously | | | | °no digital trade commitments in joint statement | | | "no joint statement |

Problem Solved?

Transparency is the first step to advance digital trade commitments.

The crux lies in their implementation.

- Governments implement the same commitments, differently.
- Substantial evidence and knowledge gaps hinder monitoring.
- Without dispute resolution, uncertainty persists.
- For larger agreements, these issues compound.

Technological advancements can help address this challenge.

Thank you

**St.Gallen
Endowment**

for Prosperity through Trade