

December 2022

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IGF2022 Policy Network on internet Fragmentation outputs  
[https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot\\_download/256/24127](https://www.intgovforum.org/en/filedepot_download/256/24127)

### ***Introduction***

Internet fragmentation is a complex issue. The many views, diverse opinions, different conceptualisations and definitions of what is and what is not internet fragmentation, or what fragmentation - in the context of the UN Secretary General's Our Common Agenda - should be avoided or addressed can hinder an open and inclusive dialogue, and discussions on common guidelines or principles.

The proposal for a Policy Network on Internet Fragmentation (PNIF) was born out of a community initiative launched by a multistakeholder coalition of civil society, business and technical community organizations in 2021 to raise awareness of the technical, policy, legal and regulatory measures and actions that pose a risk to the open, interconnected and interoperable Internet. The IGF Multistakeholder Advisory Group (MAG) confirmed Internet fragmentation as topic for an IGF intersessional activity that aims to offer a systematic and comprehensive framework, complemented by case studies, to define Internet fragmentation, its causes, and its potential effects and it aims to establish recommendations or codes of conduct that prevent fragmentation. The PNIF proposal envisaged a two-year work plan with focus in its initial year on establishing a systematic and comprehensive framework to define Internet fragmentation, its intended and unintended causes, and its potential effects.

### ***Towards a Framework for Discussing Internet Fragmentation***

The PNIF webinars and discussions confirmed the diversity of opinions, and an attempt to deduct a common definition of internet fragmentation via a survey launched earlier in the year didn't prove successful. Through the discussions, however, emerged elements of a framework that could serve to guide and orient future discussions.

The draft framework for discussing internet fragmentation constructed by the PNIF was shared with the community ahead of and discussed during a PNIF session at the IGF annual meeting in Addis Ababa. The aim is to have a refined and more mature framework ready for

a second phase of the PNIF, focused on identifying potential causes of fragmentation and defining solutions and policy approaches to avoid fragmentation.

### ***A Framework for Discussing Internet Fragmentation***

The overall goal of the framework is to serve as a general guiding and orienting tool for continuing the dialogue about fragmentation and bringing in more people and stakeholders. The framework should allow a more holistic and inclusive debate, and at the same time, create space for focused discussion and work towards concrete solutions, policy approaches and guidelines.

The Framework that emerged from the PNIF discussions conceptualises three key dimensions of fragmentation:

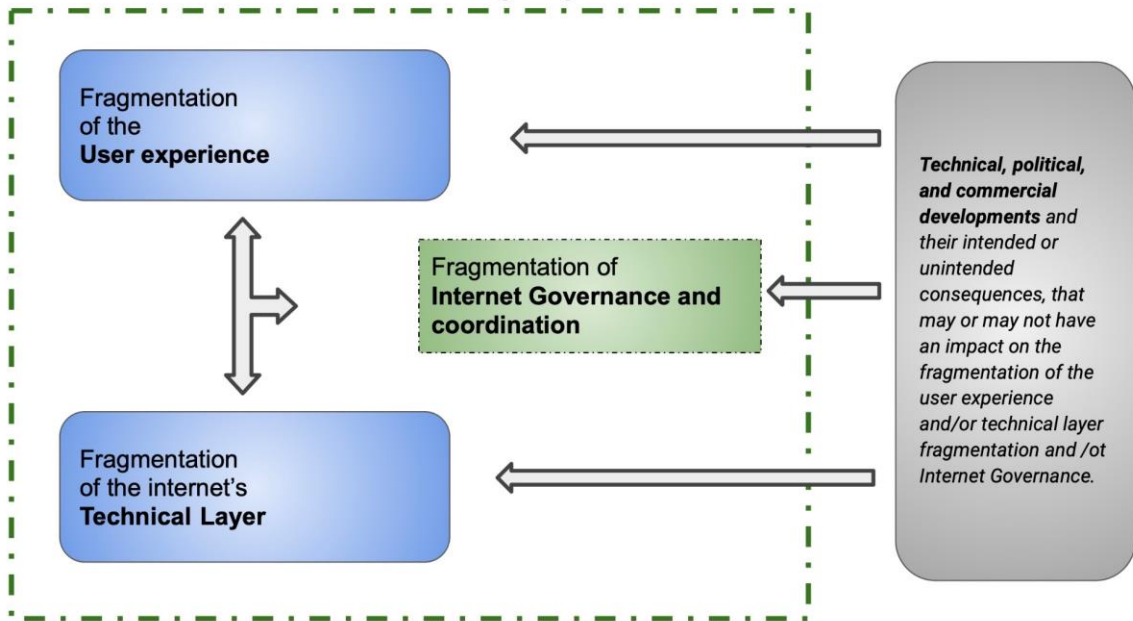
- ***fragmentation of the user experience,***
- ***fragmentation of the Internet's technical layer,*** and
- ***fragmentation of Internet Governance & coordination.***

The Framework indicates that **technical, political and commercial developments** and their intended or unintended consequences may or may not have an impact on fragmentation.

The Framework captures potential **relationships and overlap** between the dimensions, between technical fragmentation, user experience fragmentation, as well as governance fragmentation.

The **Human rights framework** and the need to maintain a **free flow of data** could be used to evaluate measures that impact the user experience and assess if the measures enhance the user experience or have a negative impact and as such should be avoided. The **interoperability of the global internet infrastructure** is proposed as reference framework to assess technical fragmentation. The internet governance dimension aims to capture the commitment to the **Multistakeholder management** of the technical layer of the internet and the existence or lack of a **global framework** across multilateral and multistakeholder venues, governments and stakeholders **to address global internet policy issues** from a human rights and free flow of data perspective.

### Draft PNIF framework for discussing fragmentation



In a next phase, it is the PNIF's intention to populate the framework with concrete examples and facilitate focused dialogues on policy approaches and explore guidelines to avoid internet fragmentation.