Digital Capitalism and (EU) Digital Policymaking

M5: European Union and Europeanization

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Course Description

From meeting people to building things, from ordering food to consuming news, digital technologies have become ubiquitous in our social and economic lives. This process of digitalization, whereby more and more of what we think, say, and do becomes mediated by digital technologies, which confronts societies with a number of challenges ranging from questions of competition policy to content moderation to rethinking welfare states. Technology, however, is not social destiny. In fact, societies can - and do - respond to the rise of digital capitalism very differently. In this context, the EU in particular has emerged as a global leader in digital policymaking, being sometimes dubbed a 'regulatory superpower' in the digital space. This raises three questions. First, who can we understand the drivers and dynamics of digital capitalism? Second, how can we understand the varying politics of digital capitalism? And third, how can we understand EU digital policymaking in particular? In this course, we will look at these three questions successively, taking into account interests, institutions, and ideas. We will first discuss various attempts to make sense of digital capitalism and its material and ideational underpinnings. We will then try to shed light on the political dynamics surrounding digital capitalism, looking at the specific challenges digital platforms pose and the variegated nature and success of political responses. Lastly, we will zoom in on the European Union's digital agenda and its attempts to achieve 'digital sovereignty', trying to ascertain the promises and pitfalls of the European digital model.

Learning Outcomes

The course aims to familiarize students with the social scientific literature on the digital transformation, the politics of digital policymaking, and the nature of EU digital policymaking in particular. At the end of the course, students should be able to

- identify and describe key processes through which digitalization shapes capitalist societies and capitalist societies shape digitalization;

- summarize and critically assess central theoretical and empirical insights of the political science research on the politics of digital policymaking;

- apply these insights to better understand the past, present and future of digital policymaking in Europe.

Requirements

Students are required to attend classes and come prepared. Having done the assigned readings is essential for successful participation. In addition, there will be four assignments that together make up the final grade.

- First, students are required to deliver a very short input presentation (around 5 minutes) for **one** session and be prepared to kick off the discussion (e.g., through a question or provocative argument). This will also make up *15%* of their grade. The input presentation is not meant to be a comprehensive summary of the texts. Rather, it is meant to identify and critically discuss one or two interesting themes that connect the readings (e.g. discussing a recent development in light of the two readings, using one reading to criticize the other, etc). The presentations can be really short, they don't need to be (and shouldn't be) longer than 5 minutes per person. The goal is to not have more than 2 presentation per session.

- Second, there will be a short exam towards the end of the seminar which will cover the readings and slides. The test ensures that students actually do the readings and pay attention in class. It will consist of around 15 short questions, most of them in multiple choice format. The test will take place in the first 10-15 minutes of the last sessions. This, too, will make up *15%* of your grade.

- Third, for **four** sessions of their choosing, students need to write short response papers (half a page to one page at most) that reflect on the readings. This will make up *20%* of their grade. The response papers are also not meant to summarize the readings. Rather, students should pick up on one or two key arguments and critically reflect on them. Again, this can be done by discussing the readings in light of each other, or by connecting them to other readings or recent events in the news, or by criticizing their assumptions or conclusions, etc.

- Lastly, students need to write an empirically oriented term paper where they take a closer look at a recent EU digital policy (proposal) (~4000 words). While the papers should build on the literature on (the politics of) digital capitalism, they should be empirical in nature. In other words, they should take the form of a case study that has a clear research design and research question and employs some qualitative and/or quantitative method to answer it. This will make up *50%* of their grade. The deadline for the term paper will be **Sunday, August 18 2024**.

Course Policy

Basically, don't cheat and try to learn stuff, some more details follow below.

Grading Policy

You need to submit all the required assignments to pass the course. However, in exceptional circumstances, alternative assignments may be permitted as a substitute. Your final grade will be a weighted average of the above-described assignments. The grading scale used ranges from 0-100 points (used for all assignments). A passing grade requires you to obtain an weighted average of 61 points or higher. The grading scale translated into the university grading scale as follows:

- **91-100** = 1 (*very good*)
- **81-90** = 2 (*good*)
- **71-80** = 3 (*satisfactory*)
- **61-70** = 4 (*sufficient*)
- **< 61** = 5 (*not sufficient*)

Generally, what is important to me when it comes to grading are two things. First, stick to the task at hand. If your presentation is meant to be 5 minutes, make it no more than 6. It's almost a dad thing to say, but these skills are important not just at a university, but pretty much everywhere you want to end

up at. Second, put a bit of effort into it, or at least make it look that way. Have some decent formatting on papers, but also and more importantly: try to be clear and crisp, which is often harder than writing long and convoluted sentences. Try to prepare a presentation that you yourself would like to listen to. Short, simple points, and make it clear when you found something unclear. You don't need to understand everything, have read a ton of additional literature, or write in a fancy way to get a very good grade. Just stick to the task and try to make sense. Detailed grading schemes for individual assignment types can be found at the end of the syllabus.

Feedback Policy

I want to give you as much feedback as you want - but I also don't want to waste my time writing more detailed feedback if you don't even care. So while by default you will only receive your grade, you can easily request written feedback by simply adding a brief note to your paper (e.g., 'I want to receive written feedback on this paper.').

E-mail Policy

You can always email me if you have an idea for a term paper, if you want to learn more about a certain topic and don't know where to start, or if you have a question that you really don't want to ask in class. Please don't email me with questions that you could easily find the answer to in the syllabus or in my previous emails. I might take it badly. Two more things that make my life easier: First, please make sure to mention the course title in the subject line of your email. Second, please reply to previous email conversations with me instead of starting a new email, especially if it's about the same topic.

Attendance Policy

You are required to attend each session, and I encourage you to prepare for and actively participate in them. However, if you really can't make it, just reach out to me, these things happen once or twice a term.

A.I. Policy

I encourage you to use large language models like *ChatGPT* to improve, speed up, or challenge your writing (be that of text or code) - I regularly do so myself. However, not only do I expect you do make this use

very (!) transparent.[1] I also want you to reflect on three things: First, current large language models are not very useful if it's really important to get things right. If you see yourself working in an area where this matters, you will have to learn how to get things right. Second, current large language models are much more useful if you actually know what you're doing - much like a cheat code in a video game is much more useful to someone who is actually good at the game. So if you want to be augmented instead of replaced by large language models, keep learning stuff. Lastly, by routinely relying on AI shortcuts you relinquish, as English professor Thomas Pfau puts it, 'the experience of intellectual achievement and growth, which can only ever be the fruit of *sustained* personal effort'. Your time at university will become 'a relentless series of logistical challenges', rather than 'a process of learning and intellectual and personal growth'. So think very clearly about what you are giving up—and risking—when trying to save some time.

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[1]For example, if you used an LLM to help you rephrase a certain sentence, add a footnote saying something like 'I used GPT-4 to help me improve the phrasing of this sentence.' If you use an LLM to come up with potential criticisms of your main argument, add a footnote at the start of the paper where you briefly explain how you used this criticism to improve your paper.

Course Outline

Week 1, March 14, 2024: Introduction

No readings for this session

Part I: Digital Capitalism

Week 2, March 21, 2024: Theorizing Digital Capitalism

Required Reading:

Törnberg, P. (2023). How platforms govern: Social regulation in digital capitalism. Big Data & Society, 10(1), 205395172311538. https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517231153808

Seidl, T. (2023). Commodification and Disruption: Theorizing Digital Capitalism. Weizenbaum Journal of the Digital Society, 3(1), 1–35. https://doi.org/10.34669/wi.wjds/3.1.2

Optional Reading:

Boyer, R. (2022). Platform capitalism: A socio-economic analysis. Socio-Economic Review, 20(4), 1857–1879. https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwaa055

Stark, D., & Pais, I. (2020). Algorithmic Management in the Platform Economy. Sociologica, 14(3), 47–72. https://doi.org/10.6092/ISSN.1971-8853/12221

Week 3, April 11, 2024: The Material Underbelly of Digital Capitalism

Required Reading:

Greene, D. (2022). Landlords of the internet: Big data and big real estate. Social Studies of Science, 52(6), 904–927. https://doi.org/10.1177/03063127221124943

Vipra, J., & Myers West, S. (2023, September 27). Computational Power and AI. https://ainowinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/AI-Now_Computational-Power-an-AI.pdf

Week 4, April 18, 2024: The Ideational Foundations of Digital Capitalism

Required Reading:

Karpf, D., Turkle, S., Malhotra, N., Hyman, L., Kneese, T., Brunton, F., Farrell, H., Swartz, L., Farrell, M., & Ahmed, S. (2023, November). The Ideologies of Silicon Valley. A Crooked Timber Seminar. https://crookedtimber.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/svseminarfinal.pdf

Nachtwey, O., & Seidl, T. (2023). The Solutionist Ethic and the Spirit of Digital Capitalism. Theory, Culture & Society, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764231196829

Optional Reading:

Farrell, H., & Fourcade, M. (2023). The Moral Economy of High-Tech Modernism. Daedalus, 152(1), 225–235. https://doi.org/10.1162/daed_a_01982

Utrata, A. (2023). Engineering Territory: Space and Colonies in Silicon Valley. American Political Science Review. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423001156

Part II: The Politics of Digital Capitalism

Week 5, April 25, 2024: Varieties of Digital Capitalism

Required Reading:

Thelen, K. (2018). Regulating Uber: The Politics of the Platform Economy in Europe and the United States. Perspectives on Politics, 16(4), 938–953.

Sieker, F. (2022). Platform work and access to social protection across major European countries. Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy, 38(3), 193–207. https://doi.org/10.1017/ics.2022.13

Optional Reading:

Valdez, J. (2022). The politics of Uber: Infrastructural power in the United States and Europe. Regulation & Governance, rego.12456. https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12456

Week 6, May 2, 2024: Power in the Digital Age

Required Reading:

Culpepper, P. D., & Thelen, K. (2020). Are We All Amazon Primed? Consumers and the Politics of Platform Power. Comparative Political Studies, 53(2), 288–318. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414019852687

Kemmerling, M., & Trampusch, C. (2023). Digital power resources (DPR): The political economy of structural and infrastructural business power in digital(ized) capitalism. Socio-Economic Review, 21(4), 1851–1876. https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwac059

Optional Reading:

Seidl, T. (2022). The politics of platform capitalism: A case study on the regulation of Uber in New York. Regulation & Governance, 16(2), 357–374. https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12353

Week 7, May 16, 2024: Digital Countermovements

Required Reading:

Lehdonvirta, V. (2022). Cloud empires: How digital platforms are overtaking the state and how we can regain control. The MIT Press. Introduction, Chapters 9 & 10.

Part III: EU Digital Policymaking

Week 8, May 23, 2024: The Politics of Data Protection in the EU

Required Reading:

Kalyanpur, N., & Newman, A. L. (2019). The MNC-Coalition Paradox: Issue Salience, Foreign Firms and the General Data Protection Regulation. Journal of Common Market Studies, 57(3), 448–467. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12810

Jang, W., & Newman, A. L. (2022). Enforcing European Privacy Regulations from Below: Transnational Fire Alarms and the General Data Protection Regulation. JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 60(2), 283–300. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13215

Optional Reading:

Rossi, A. (2018). How the Snowden Revelations Saved the EU General Data Protection Regulation. The International Spectator, 53(4), 95–111.

Li, S., & Newman, A. L. (2022). Over the shoulder enforcement in European regulatory networks: the role of arbitrage mitigation mechanisms in the General Data Protection Regulation. Journal of European Public Policy, 1–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2022.2069845

Week 9, June 6, 2024: Governing Artificial Intelligence

Required Reading:

Krarup, T., & Horst, M. (2023). European artificial intelligence policy as digital single market making. Big Data & Society, 10(1), 205395172311538. https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517231153811

Paul, R. (2022). The politics of regulating artificial intelligence technologies: A competition state perspective.

Optional Reading:

Veale, M., Matus, K., & Gorwa, R. (2023). AI and Global Governance: Modalities, Rationales, Tensions. Annual Review of Law and Social Science, 19(1), annurev-lawsocsci-020223-040749. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-020223-040749

Gray Widder, D., West, S., & Whittaker, M. (2023). Open (For Business): Big Tech, Concentrated Power, and the Political Economy of Open AI. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4543807

Week 10, June 13, 2024: Reading Week & Term Paper Proposal

There will be no in-person session this week. Instead, you will have time to go over the readings and slides in preparation for the test the week after. In addition, you are expected to send me a short outline (topic/research question plus one-paragraph description) of your idea for the term paper. You will get feedback on this, but it will not be graded. Below is some general background reading on EU digital policymaking that might help you situate your idea in a broader historical and theoretical context.

Optional Background Reading:

Cioffi, J. W., Kenney, M. F., & Zysman, J. (2022). Platform power and regulatory politics: Polanyi for the twenty-first century. New Political Economy, 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2022.2027355

Heidebrecht, S. (2023). From Market Liberalism to Public Intervention: Digital Sovereignty and Changing European Union Digital Single Market Governance. Journal of Common Market Studies. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13488

Newman, A. L. (2020). Digital Policy-Making in the European Union: Building the New Economy of an Information Society. In H. Wallace, M. A. Pollack, C. Roederer-Rynning, & A. R. Young (Eds.), Policy-making in the European Union (Eighth edition, pp. 275–296).

Sharon, T., & Gellert, R. (2023). Regulating Big Tech expansionism? Sphere transgressions and the limits of Europe's digital regulatory strategy. Information, Communication & Society, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2023.224652

Week 11, June 20, 2024: Geopolitics and Digital Sovereignty

In this session, we will have a short test on the readings and slides!

Required Reading:

Bradford, A. (2023). Digital empires: The global battle to regulate technology. Oxford University Press, Introduction.

Adler-Nissen, R., & Eggeling, K. A. (2024). The Discursive Struggle for Digital Sovereignty: Security, Economy, Rights and the Cloud Project Gaia-X. Journal of Common Market Studies.

Optional Reading:

Seidl, T., & Schmitz, L. (2023). Moving on to not fall behind? Technological sovereignty and the 'geo-dirigiste' turn in EU industrial policy. Journal of European Public Policy. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2023.2248204

Detailed Grading Schemes[2]

Term paper

Strength and Originality of Argument

- **91-100:** *The argument is exceptionally clear, compelling, and thoroughly grounded in critical thinking, showcasing a high degree of originality. It demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the topic, integrating novel insights or approaches with persuasive and well-substantiated reasoning.*
- **81-90:** *The argument is strong and well-founded, displaying a good level of original thinking and critical engagement with the subject matter. It presents a coherent and convincing case, supported by evidence, with some innovative perspectives or methods.*
- **71-80:** *The work shows an adequate argument that is reasonably clear and supported, featuring some degree of originality. The argument has merit and is founded on appropriate reasoning, though it may occasionally lack depth or fail to fully persuade.*
- **61-70:** *There is an attempt at arguing a thesis, but the argument often lacks clarity, depth, and convincing evidence. Originality is limited, with the work showing minimal innovation in thought or approach. The argument is weak and not particularly persuasive.*
- **< 61:** *The argument is poorly structured, unclear, or largely absent, with no evidence of original thinking or critical engagement. It fails to make a convincing case, lacking both in strength and in the presentation of any novel insights or perspectives.*

Theoretical Framework and Literature Engagement

- **91-100:** *Demonstrates an exceptional understanding and engagement with the theoretical framework and relevant literature. The research is characterized by extensive depth and breadth, critically engaging with a wide range of sources to offer new insights or interpretations. It reflects a sophisticated integration of theory with the research topic.*
- **81-90:** *Shows a thorough understanding of the theoretical framework with a very good engagement with pertinent literature. The research covers a broad spectrum of sources, providing a solid grounding in the field and contributing to the topic with some new perspectives or critical reflections.*

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[2]It may be that not all of these categories apply (to the same extent) to each individual assignment. Moreover, specific aspects described in the Requirements section will be important above and beyond the general grading scheme outlined below. For example, in this course, an empirical focus is essential and methodological and research design considerations will therefore play a more important role.

- **71-80:** *Provides an adequate review of the theoretical framework and engages reasonably with relevant literature. The research demonstrates a sufficient depth and breadth, identifying key theories and sources, though it may lack in offering substantial new insights or critical analysis.*
- **61-70:** *Exhibits a basic understanding of the theoretical framework with a limited engagement with relevant literature. The research scope is somewhat narrow, with gaps in the depth and breadth of literature reviewed, offering minimal new interpretations or critical engagement with existing theories.*
- **< 61:** *Shows poor understanding and engagement with the theoretical framework and literature. The research is significantly lacking in depth and breadth, with little to no critical engagement with relevant sources or theories, failing to adequately support or contextualize the research topic.*

Methodology and Empirical Evidence

- **91-100:** *The methodology is excellently chosen, well-executed, and thoroughly justified, with empirical evidence used effectively to support the argument. Evidence is highly relevant, accurately interpreted, and integrated seamlessly into the research, enhancing the strength and credibility of the findings.*
- **81-90:** *The methodology is mostly appropriate and well-executed, with good use of empirical evidence that supports the main argument. While mostly relevant and well-integrated, there may be minor issues in execution or interpretation that do not significantly detract from the overall strength of the research.*
- **71-80:** *The methodology is adequate, with some issues in choice or execution. Empirical evidence is used, with some relevance and support for the argument, but the integration and interpretation of data could be improved to strengthen the research outcomes.*
- **61-70:** *The methodology shows a basic level of appropriateness and execution, but lacks in thoroughness or precision. Empirical evidence is present but limited or flawed, with issues in relevance or integration that weaken the argument and research findings.*
- **< 61:** *The methodology is poor or inappropriate, with significant flaws in execution. Empirical evidence is poorly used, irrelevant, or largely absent, offering little to no support for the argument or findings. This level reflects a fundamental misunderstanding or neglect of sound research practices.*

Topicality and Academic or Practical Relevance

- **91-100:** *The research is exceptionally topical, engaging deeply with current questions or themes within the field. It demonstrates a high degree of academic relevance, providing insightful analysis that could inform theoretical frameworks, discussions, or future research. The paper offers thoughtful reflections on potential practical insights or implications, acknowledging its broader significance without overemphasizing direct policy applications.*

- **81-90:** *Shows strong topicality and relevance, connecting well with contemporary scholarly debates or issues. It makes a notable academic contribution, with implications that suggest possible avenues for further investigation, theoretical development, or practical considerations in a more general sense. Practical insights are offered in a way that enriches the academic discourse.*
- **71-80:** *Adequately addresses current topics and demonstrates relevance to ongoing academic conversations. It offers some practical insights, presenting a grounded perspective on how the findings might be applied or considered in broader contexts. The paper contributes to academic understanding, albeit with more limited scope or depth.*
- **61-70:** *Exhibits basic engagement with topical issues, with some relevance to the academic field. It hints at practical insights or implications, though these are not fully developed or are only tangentially addressed. The work provides a modest contribution, with potential areas for further exploration identified but not deeply explored.*
- **< 61:** *Lacks significant topicality or relevance, with minimal engagement with current academic or practical concerns. The paper offers little in the way of practical insights, failing to connect findings to broader discussions, potential applications, or theoretical implications.*

Structure and Organization

- **91-100:** *Excellently structured. Outstanding organization and clarity.*
- **81-90:** *Very well-structured. Good organization that supports content.*
- **71-80:** *Adequately structured. Generally clear with some organizational issues.*
- **61-70:** *Poorly structured. Some effort at organization but lacks clarity.*
- **< 61:** *Very poorly structured. Disorganized and difficult to follow.*

Writing Quality and Clarity[3]

- **91-100:** *Exceptional writing. Fluent, clear, and elegant.*
- **81-90:** *Very good writing. Mostly clear with very few errors.*
- **71-80:** *Good writing. Generally clear but with some errors.*
- **61-70:** *Adequate writing. Understandable but often awkward and with noticeable errors.*
- **< 61:** *Poor writing. Frequent errors and difficult to understand.*

Citation and Academic Integrity

- **91-100:** *Perfect or near-perfect adherence to citation and formatting guidelines. High academic integrity.*

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[3]I have also collected general advise for how to write a good term paper on my website - check it out if you want to improve your chances of getting a very good grade.

- **81-90:** *Minor errors in citation or formatting. Generally adheres to academic standards.*
- **71-80:** *Some errors in citation or formatting, but generally correct.*
- **61-700:** *Adequate adherence but with noticeable errors.*
- **< 61:** *Poor adherence to citation and formatting. Major errors or ethical issues.*

Presentation

Clarity and Organization of Presentation

- **91-100:** *The presentation is exceptionally clear and well-organized, with a logical flow that enhances understanding. The speaker demonstrates outstanding command of the material, using visual aids effectively to underscore key points.*
- **81-90:** *The presentation is very clear and generally well-organized. The structure supports the content, and visual aids are used effectively to highlight important information.*
- **71-80:** *The presentation is clear with a reasonable structure. There may be some minor issues with the flow or effectiveness of visual aids, but these do not significantly detract from the overall understanding.*
- **61-700:** *The presentation has a basic level of clarity and organization, but lacks polish. Visual aids and the presentation's structure are adequate but could be improved to better support the content.*
- **< 61:** *The presentation lacks clarity and organization. The flow of information is difficult to follow, and visual aids are poorly utilized or detract from the content.*

Engagement and Communication Skills

- **91-100:** *The speaker engages the audience exceptionally well, with excellent verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Questions are handled with insight and confidence.*
- **81-90:** *The speaker effectively engages the audience, with very good communication skills. Questions are answered competently, demonstrating a good understanding of the topic.*
- **71-80:** *The speaker shows adequate engagement with the audience and reasonable communication skills. Responses to questions indicate a fair understanding of the topic.*
- **61-700:** *The speaker's engagement with the audience and communication skills are basic. There are noticeable difficulties in effectively addressing questions or in maintaining audience interest.*
- **< 61:** *The speaker struggles significantly with audience engagement and communication. Questions are poorly addressed, indicating a lack of preparation or understanding.*

Strength and Originality of Argument

- **91-100:** *The argument presented is exceptionally clear, compelling, and original. It demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the topic, integrating novel insights with persuasive reasoning.*
- **81-90:** *The argument is strong and well-founded, with a good level of original thinking. It presents a coherent case, supported by evidence, with some innovative perspectives.*
- **71-80:** *The argument is adequate, reasonably clear, and supported. It features some degree of originality but may lack depth or full persuasiveness.*
- **61-700:** *The argument often lacks clarity, depth, and convincing evidence. Originality is limited, with minimal innovation in thought or approach.*
- **< 61:** *The argument is poorly structured, unclear, or largely absent, with no evidence of original thinking. It fails to make a convincing case.*

Relevance and Engagement with Literature

- **91-100:** *The presentation demonstrates an exceptional engagement with relevant literature and theoretical frameworks, situating the topic within broader scholarly debates effectively..*
- **81-90:** *Shows thorough engagement with pertinent literature, providing solid grounding in the field and contributing insights.*
- **71-80:** *Provides an adequate review of relevant literature, though it may lack substantial new insights or critical analysis.*
- **61-700:** *Exhibits a basic understanding and engagement with relevant literature but has gaps in depth and breadth.*
- **< 61:** *Shows poor understanding and engagement with the literature, significantly lacking in depth and breadth.*