

International Political Economy and Regulation Theory in the Politics of Connectivity

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Outline

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Regulation Theory
 - Regime of accumulation
 - Platform Capitalism vs. Techno-Feudalism
 - Mode of Regulation
 - DNA, DMA, DSA
 - Internet Freedom Agenda
- 3. International Political Theory
 - Realist, Liberal, Critical
 - Case Study
- 4. Conclusion

Hypotheses

1. Platform capitalism has generated a crisis of regulation.

2. Control over digital infrastructure and data creates structural power.

3. The fragmentation of internet governance results from conflicts between states, firms, and competing regulatory models.

French Regulation School: Regime of Accumulation

Defines how wealth is produced, distributed and reinvested in an economy.

Platform capitalism (Nick Srnicek): Massive tech companies dominate by acting as digital infrastructures

Techno-feudalism (Varoufakis and Durand):

- Control over platforms
- Dependence on Big Tech
- Data ownership
- Limited competition

French Regulation School: Mode of Regulation

The ensemble of institutional forms and state practices that together temporarily stabilise a regime of accumulation by managing them enough that accumulation can continue.

- **Digital Networks Act (DNA):** Modernise and simplify the rules for electronic communications and digital network infrastructure across the EU
- **Digital Markets Act (DMA):** Ensure fair, competitive, and open digital markets
- **Digital Services Act (DSA):** Creates a safer and more transparent online environment
- **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR):** Regulation on privacy and security law.

The Internet Freedom Agenda

- The Internet Freedom Agenda (US government): Universal human rights and freedoms apply equally online and offline
- **Evgeny Morozov critiques this:**
- He argues that it could be a powerful tool for engaging in mass surveillance, political repression, and spreading nationalist and extremist propaganda.
- Finds the Internet Freedom Agenda naïve and even counterproductive to the goal of promoting democracy through the Web

Realist IPE

Realist IPE emphasises that states prioritise their national security and power over global economic cooperation.

Structural Power (Susan Strange): The capacity to shape the overarching rules, systems, and institutions that govern behaviour, rather than simply forcing others to do your bidding. It is operated through the four pillars:

- Security
- Production
- Finance
- Knowledge

Liberal IPE

- Free markets
- Minimal state intervention
- International institutions
- Multistakeholderism
- Regime Theory

- Example: World Trade Organisation (WTO)
 - Represents a compromise between absolute free trade and the need for states to intervene to protect domestic workers, the environment, or social welfare.

Critical IPE

- **Neo-Gramscian approach:** The perspective that focuses on how global elites create “hegemony” through international institutions and dominant ideologies
- **Historical materialism:** Emphasising that production and class relations are driving forces of the global political economy.
- **Post-structuralism and post-colonialism:** Where there are power dynamics inherent in economic development, globalisation, and knowledge production, emphasising how the global economy marginalises the Global South and perpetuates colonial legacies.

Digital sovereignty in the Global South

- Following the 2013 NSA surveillance revelations (Snowden disclosures):
- Brazil actively pushed for a re-evaluation of global internet governance.
- This eventually led to the *Marco Civil da Internet*, an attempt to guarantee net neutrality and privacy rights while pushing back against the unchecked power of U.S. social media giants.



Conclusion

- Regulation Theory and International Political Economy together reveal that internet governance is not primarily a technical challenge but a political struggle over power and accumulation.
- Regulation Theory shows that the expansion of platform capitalism has created pressures for new forms of governance, while IPE demonstrates that states and firms compete to shape the rules of the digital economy according to their interests.
- The resulting fragmentation of internet governance reflects both a crisis of regulation and a redistribution of structural power.

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Discussion Question

- Can a global mode of digital regulation emerge under conditions of geopolitical fragmentation?