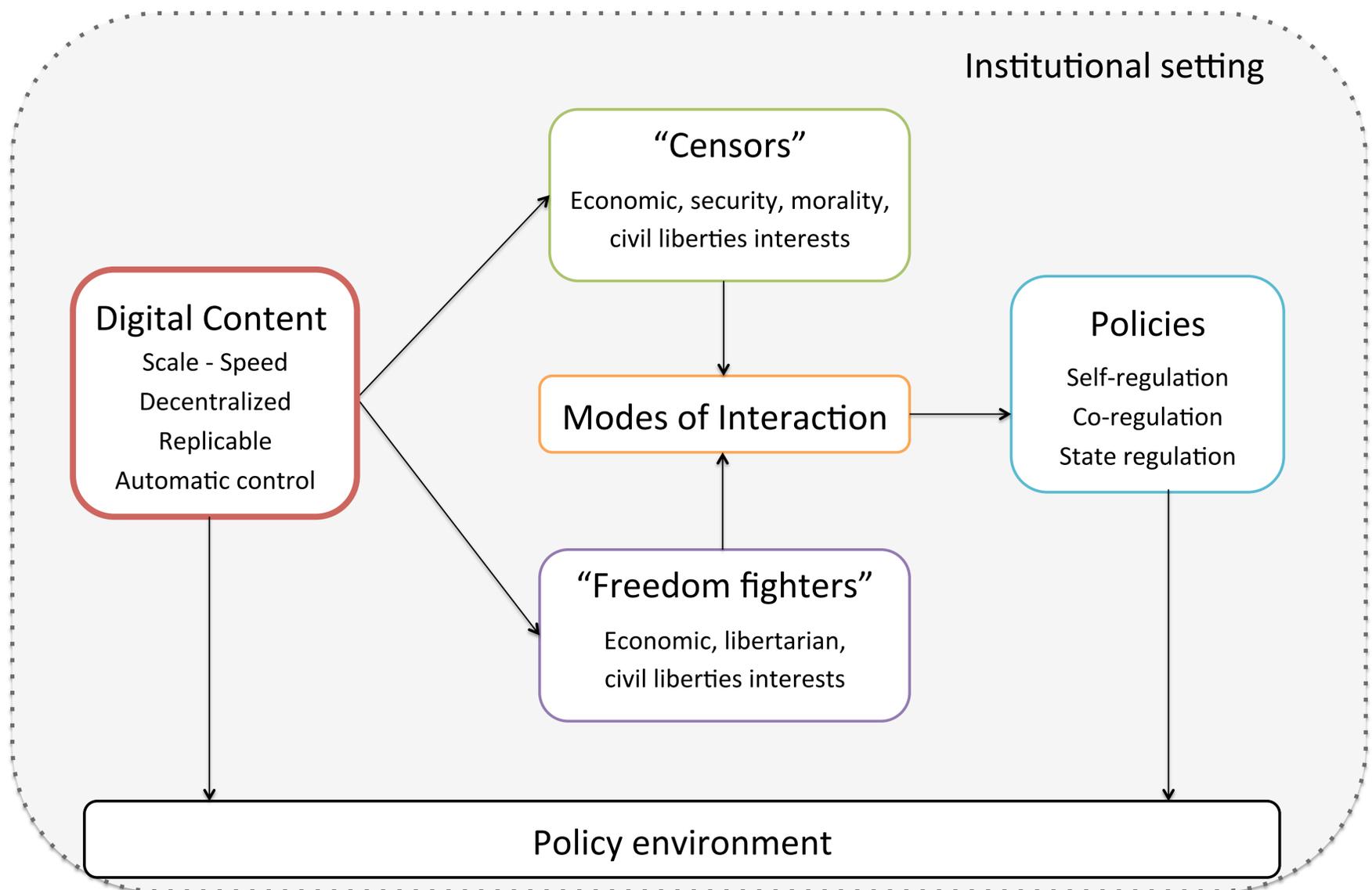


Internet Blocking in Liberal Democracies

A Comparative Analysis

Filtering and blocking are becoming a global norm as states and corporate actors make use of increasingly sophisticated algorithms to deal with problematic content. In liberal democracies, this poses a series of legal, political and technical questions that are answered differently according to the institutional context, the actors involved and their modes of interaction. The research project builds on actor-centered institutionalism and comparative public policy theories to carry out a comparative analysis of blocking initiatives in 21 established liberal democracies. We investigate why access blocking has become a new policy tool and which political variables can explain its emergence.

The digitalization and convergence of a vast variety of content poses new challenges in terms of scale, spread and possibilities for control to private and public actors. However, it also offers new possibilities of automatic control leading to highly polarized debates about introducing access blocking techniques without contravening to democratic principles and the rule of law. Actors invoke economic, constitutional and security reasons to promote or reject access blocking techniques. Their interactions in a given institutional setting lead to various forms of content regulations, including self-, co- and legislative regulation, all of which feed back into the existing regulatory setting.



The project aims to explain how variations in Internet blocking policies can be explained across a set of 21 Western liberal democracies. If self-regulation is the dominant mechanism, there have been various attempts at introducing state legislated access blocking including in the U.S., Australia, Germany, France and Italy. We examine legislative proposals aimed at introducing access blocking mechanisms to test the following hypotheses:

- Internet blocking legislation is the result of **technological and socio-economic change**,
- Yet, it largely depends on **previous content regulations**.
- **Organized interests** are important drivers of blocking legislation.
- **Political parties** play a secondary role in the success of blocking legislation.
- **Institutional factors**, in particular constitutional provisions and the judiciary system, determine the type and extent of blocking introduced.
- **International factors** largely influence all of the above.