

## Platforms, Politics, and Policy Change: Framing A Governance Approach to TNCs in the Gig Economy

Plataformas, política y cambio institucional: un enfoque para el estudio de la gobernanza de las ERT en la economía de los pequeños encargos

Ronald Sáenz-Leandro<sup>1,a</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Internet Interdisciplinary Institute (IN3), Doctoral School, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain

 [rsaenzl@uoc.edu](mailto:rsaenzl@uoc.edu)

Received: 20/10/2023; Accepted: 30/10/2023

### Abstract

In social science, platform capitalism is becoming more analyzed as digital app-based platforms have revolutionized the global exchange of goods and services, prompting multifaceted challenges within society, economics, and politics. Platform governance emerges as this changing landscape unfolds, illuminating the intricate interplay between national and local regulatory frameworks and the burgeoning power dynamics among diverse stakeholders. This article provides a framework for examining the complex political and governance issues that have surfaced in the gig economy, mainly focused on the proliferation of ride-hailing platforms, such as Uber, also known as Transportation Network Companies (TNCs). This article examines the framework of platform governance contributing theoretically by putting into dialogue a literature primarily focused on studying social media with another branch of the platform society in which policy disruption has been evident, such as transportation and urban mobility. The analysis focuses on three fundamental dimensions of political economy: ideas, interests, and institutions. The paper also reviews how these three approaches have operated in recent scholarly literature. Finally, the article underscores the need for future research to address this complexity from a contingent approach to promote a comprehensive understanding of platform regulation.

**Keywords:** the Gig Economy; Platform Governance; Platform Regulation; TNCs.

## Resumen

En las ciencias sociales, el capitalismo de plataformas se analiza cada vez más a medida que las plataformas digitales basadas en aplicaciones han revolucionado el intercambio global de bienes y servicios, generando desafíos multifacéticos dentro de la sociedad, la economía y la política. La gobernanza de plataformas surge a medida que se desarrolla este panorama cambiante, iluminando la intrincada interacción entre los marcos regulatorios nacionales y locales, así como las dinámicas de poder entre diversos actores. Este artículo proporciona un marco para examinar los desafíos políticos y de gobernanza que han surgido en la economía de los pequeños encargos surgidos a raíz de la proliferación de plataformas de transporte como Uber, también conocidas como Empresas de Redes de Transporte (ERT). Este artículo examina el marco de la gobernanza de plataformas contribuyendo teóricamente al poner en diálogo una literatura centrada principalmente en el estudio de las redes sociales con otra rama de la sociedad de plataformas en la que la disrupción tecnológica ha sido evidente, como lo es el transporte y la movilidad urbana. El análisis se centra en tres dimensiones fundamentales de la economía política: ideas, intereses e instituciones. El artículo también contribuye revisando cómo estos tres enfoques han operado en la literatura académica reciente. Finalmente, el artículo subraya la necesidad de investigaciones futuras que aborden esta complejidad desde un enfoque contingente para promover una comprensión integral de la regulación de las plataformas.

**Palabras clave:** la economía de los pequeños encargos; Gobernanza de plataformas; Regulación de plataformas; ERT.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The *gig economy*, commonly defined as the platform-mediated labor market characterized by temporary, casual, or non-permanent work arrangements (Woodcock & Graham, 2020), stands as a crucial domain wherein the social implications of platform capitalism stand out in the context of the digital transformation of labor markets (Kessler, 2019). While the gig economy has unlocked a spectrum of opportunities for facilitating employment, it has concurrently reshaped conventional perceptions of labor in the digital era (Prassl, 2018).

The confrontation between digital platforms acting as technological disruptors, traditional labor sectors, and established legal frameworks has manifested across different geographical regions and sectors of the economy (Woodcock, 2021). This clash has extended from remote forms of gig work, such as microtasking and cloudwork, to geographically tethered models encompassing domestic and care labor, delivery services, and ride-hailing (Ravenelle, 2019).

Conflicts related to *platform capitalism* (Srnicek, 2016) have manifested themselves in struggles to improve working conditions in the digital sphere, in the search for regulations that balance contracts and labor relations, and in competition between traditional and emerging industries worldwide (Umney et al., 2023). Despite recent advances in understanding the expansion and trends of digital platforms and labor concerns in different parts of the world, it is essential to highlight that each of these regulatory struggles and debates highlights local particularities, especially in the models of the gig economy focused on specific geographic locations (Tucker, 2020).

In urban transportation, ride-hailing platforms commercialized by diverse well-known Transportation Network Companies (TNCs) worldwide, such as Uber, Lyft, DiDi, Bolt, and Cabify, have also generated discussions beyond labor issues. These debates have covered political issues related to consumer safety, fair competition in the taxi market, public aspects such as environmental and urban impacts, development, and possibilities for social compensation concerning this business model (Collier et al., 2018).

This article seeks to put the former concerns into context through the lens of platform governance. We focus on how research about TNCs has developed across different academic fields and geographic settings in recent years. Additionally, we make a theoretical contribution by bridging the gap between the literature concerning the regulation of social media platforms and the realm of urban mobility. We pay special attention to three key dimensions: ideas, interests, and institutions. To achieve this, we employ a *narrative literature review* methodology to comprehensively synthesize research findings within this specific area of study (Block & Fisch, 2020).

In sum, the analysis presented in this article offers a unique perspective that, thus far, has yet to be thoroughly explored in the realm of TNC governance. We examine trends and challenges at the crossroads of new media studies and other disciplines, such as political science.

The paper's structure consists of two main sections. The first section delves into the implications of the platform economy in the political and governance sphere, analyzing the challenges faced by local regulatory frameworks and the power dynamics between the various actors involved in these processes. The second section addresses the three dimensions of platform governance explored in the specialized literature, all seen from the political economy perspective. Finally, the article summarizes the key ideas of the discussion. It proposes a

research agenda that considers the interaction between States, civil society organizations, and the influence of platform firms on regulation.

## 2. STUDYING THE PLATFORM SOCIETY BEYOND SOCIAL MEDIA

*Platforms* are often defined as those new data infrastructures that have revolutionized how firms, users, and developers interact in today's globalized economy due to the advancement of the Internet. It also has allowed sophistication in the extraction of browsing data and consumption patterns, the complexity of its processing through algorithms, and the ability to take profit in this platform business model (Poell et al., 2019).

This technological evolution has reconfigured power dynamics at a global level. A few big tech companies have come to dominate multiple industries and sectors, including advertising, social media, cultural production, mobile communications, retail, housing, and urban transportation (van Dijck et al., 2018). This corporate domain has created an ecosystem of digital platforms with specific governance systems and distinct approaches to understanding the role of goods and services as consumers, suppliers, and regulators (Hein et al., 2020). In recent decades, technological and economic changes have driven new Internet-based business models (Rahman and Thelen, 2019). In this context, social sciences have paid attention to *platformization*, a process in which platforms and their principles have infiltrated the economy, government structure, and multiple areas of society (Helmond, 2015).

In this context, essential concerns arise about public values and the reconfiguration of discourses on democratic governance, accountability, and growing inequalities (van Dijck et al., 2018). Furthermore, digitalization and platformization processes are not limited to developed countries, affecting consolidated democracies and authoritarian regimes alike (Chan & Kwok, 2021).

Platformization has also brought to light the global challenges governments confront, by struggling with anticipating, addressing, and effectively managing the far-reaching implications of the emergence of gig economy platforms. These platforms impact established and emergent economic sectors, catalyzing ongoing debates concerning regulatory frameworks poorly adapted to the flexibility, relocation, and quick exchanges through internet flows (Cartwright, 2021).

Expanding upon Flew's seminal work (2021), which traces the transition from the early 1990s era of the open internet to the contemporary discourses of the 21st century concerning the *platformized internet*, the current landscape points to the emergence of a third phase characterized by intensified internet regulation. Flew (2019) also observes that the contemporary platformized internet landscape markedly diverges from the libertarian paradigms of the 1990s and early 2000s, which dictated minimal state intervention in the so-called network society (Comunello & Mulargia, 2023).

As a result, the process of platformization has guided the trajectory of Internet Studies into a "regulatory turn", with a focus on public concerns such as privacy, online security, datafication, algorithmic influence, disinformation, hate speech, and issues related to labor and politics (Flew, 2021). The gig economy has also impacted the governance of sectors crucial to the development of a nation, such as the labor market (Snellen & de Hollander, 2017).

These diverse issues distinctly reposition scholarly focus onto the state's central role in managing societal repercussions arising from platform-mediated activities spanning various economic sectors (Haggart et al., 2021). Platforms have demonstrated their political and social

influence in recent years (Gillespie, 2010), leading to increased attention to gig economy platforms in terms of intermediation and capital accumulation on a global level.

Currently, scholars are delving into the dynamics between governments, platform firms, civil society, and political change, exploring the interplay of competing ideas, interests, and institutional arrangements at local, national, and cross-national levels (Flew & Gillett, 2021; Winseck, 2020). Therefore, a critical area of research is emerging around the intersection between digital platforms, labor markets, and political-economic considerations around regulatory frameworks (Malik et al., 2021). Concerns regarding the influence of platform firms and their role as political entities have gained prominence in recent years (Culpepper & Thelen, 2020; Popiel, 2020) as they progressively engage in the policy-making processes associated with the regulation of their market across diverse contexts (Borkholder et al., 2018).

### 3. PLATFORM GOVERNANCE: RETHINKING THE IMPACT OF PLATFORMIZATION ON POLITICS AND INSTITUTIONS

Recent revelations by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) published as "The Uber Files" (2022) disclosed compelling evidence regarding "the lobbying Machine" employed by the Silicon Valley company within governments. Spanning both the Northern and Global South regions, this practice is documented as far back as 2013. Such corporate practices underscore that "political factors also play a significant role, as influential platforms have wielded their influence over state legislatures, enacting preemption laws that prohibit cities from regulating app-based services" (Vallas & Schor, 2020, p. 278). Hence, the current discourse surrounding the platform economy strongly advocates a multifaceted approach transcending the traditional realms of work sociology and labor relations (Tucker, 2020).

Following Hall's classification (1997), which delves into inquiries concerning the voices exerting influence over political processes and the adequate representation within decision-making structures that mold policies, we posit that a political economy perspective offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing the regulation of the gig economy platforms. This theoretical approach is also grounded in the premise that policy responses result from the interactions among diverse stakeholders characterized by varying interests, modes of action, and narratives within specific institutional frameworks (Aguilera et al., 2021). Within this context, we examine these relationships through the lens of platform governance.

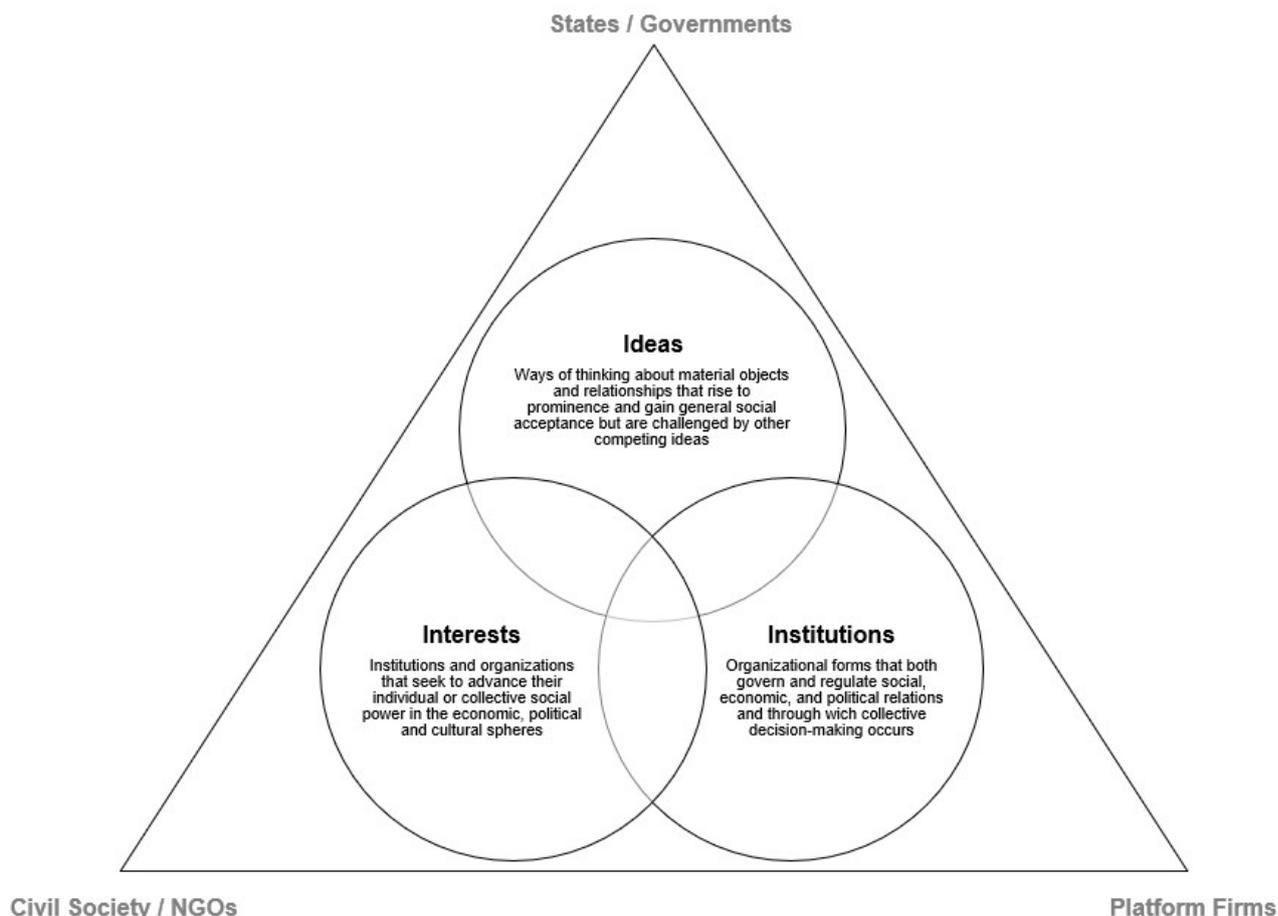
*Platform governance* is the subject of various theoretical discussions rooted in a decentralized approach to regulation, garnering substantial attention in the context of platforms to transcend state-centric perspectives, involving diverse entities frequently perceived as influential actors within complex social and market ecosystems, in other words, understood as interactive "constellations of public and private stakeholders" (Leerssen, 2021, para. 1). Furthermore, this framework is fueled by the emerging governance theory known as regulatory governance, which explores how a burgeoning economy generates transaction costs at the local level due to the absence of legal coordination grounded in diversity and competition (Bilbil, 2019).

Compared to conventional political economy paradigms, platform governance furnishes a comprehensive understanding of how platforms' actions, policies, and influence intersect with politics. Furthermore, it also sets forth an interdisciplinary research agenda that aims to unravel the complex web of governance relationships shaping interactions among different

stakeholders in today's platform-driven society (Gorwa, 2019a), involving states, governments or regulatory agencies, civil society, and grassroots organizations (unions, NGOs, consumer advocacy groups) and platform firms.

Drawing from Gorwa's (2019b) and Flew's (2021) proposals for studying social media platforms, we state that a similar triangular configuration is a valuable framework for drawing a governance approach to TNCs. Figure 1 summarizes our theoretical understanding by highlighting the multistakeholder regulatory arena, emphasizing the pivotal role in grasping the intricacies of policy change in the gig economy.

Figure 1. "The Three Is" in the Platform Governance Triangle



Source: Author based on Gorwa (2019b), Hall (1997), and Flew (2021).

This approach enhances our comprehension of the intricate interactions and negotiations among stakeholders when technological innovations, such as TNCs, are introduced within local contexts. Ongoing debates on platform regulation are incorporating analytical frameworks from diverse disciplines to elucidate the pivotal role of platform firms, conceiving them as "institutional entrepreneurs" endowed with substantial influence (Baron, 2018). Furthermore, other conceptual paradigms are being explored, including examining grassroots organizations' influence on regulatory processes and their potential to engender institutional change in a complementary fashion (Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2021).

While the notion that platform firms wield a central role in institutional change is a prevailing concern in scholarly literature, the constation that the regulation of the platform

economy can exhibit variations contingent upon local contexts and dynamics is gaining momentum as a novel approach to advancing comparative research (Valdez, 2022).

#### 4. BETWEEN IDEAS, INTERESTS, AND INSTITUTIONS: CURRENT APPROACHES TO REGULATION AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN THE RIDE-HAILING MARKET

In examining platform capitalism, information, and communication technologies (ICT) have assumed considerable significance in unveiling transformations within sectors such as transportation and mobility (Snellen and de Hollander, 2017). Specifically, research concerning policy responses and institutional changes within the gig economy has grown substantially over the past decade. Scholars have illuminated pivotal factors in regulatory processes on a global scale by concentrating on the ride-hailing industry. Their work has unveiled the intrinsic interconnection of ideas, interests, and institutions in terms of analysis and methodology. These three dimensions constitute fundamental elements in comparative political economy, facilitating the comprehension of how diverse variables and contexts influence policy responses and regulatory alterations.

Considering the increasing significance of the gig economy and its profound effects on various aspects of the political economy and contemporary societal changes (Ness, 2023), we aim to provide a condensed overview of the scholarly trends within a political economy framework. To accomplish this, we utilize a *narrative literature review* methodology, allowing us to amalgamate research findings within this field of study and present the critical insights related to TNCs impact on platform governance and policy change. Although the purpose here is not to conduct a systematic or meta-analytical examination, we hope to shed light on the multifaceted nature of the gig economy and its far-reaching implications from the following three analytical approaches.

##### 4.1. Ideas

The first dimension revolves around the pivotal role of ideas, discourses, and narratives in shaping regulatory responses to the gig economy and businesses operating on platforms. It aims to realize how ideas can significantly influence the formulation of regulatory responses to the emergence of platforms and give attention to how policymakers and various stakeholders perceive and construct issues related to platform regulation, as this perception can profoundly impact the resulting regulatory framework. Researchers adopting this approach often delve into the communicative aspects of regulation, focusing on analyzing the construction of ideas associated with the gig economy, technology, and labor markets. They usually examine how ideas navigate the discourse within the political arena and influence the policy-making process.

One of the primary methodologies within this analytical dimension involves examining policy framing processes, the discursive legitimation of regulatory preferences among stakeholders, and their influence on regulatory outcomes. This approach involves identifying the various frames employed by competing actors in the context of regulation. It acknowledges that framing is pivotal in shaping how actors perceive an issue and how it influences their understanding and discourse regarding platform regulation. The significance of framing underscores the increasing emphasis on the discursive dimension in recent specialized studies focused on the public discourse surrounding the platform economy (Adler,

2021; Benli-Trichet & Kübler, 2022; Collier et al., 2018; Distelmans & Scheerlinck, 2021; Lanamäki & Tuvikene, 2022; Pelzer et al., 2019; Seidl, 2020).

For instance, when examining the discursive strategies and rhetoric employed by various stakeholders in the United States, Lehmann et al. (2022) introduce the concept of "discursive-institutional work." This concept illustrates how conflicts between actors with differing objectives, modes of operation, and narratives rooted in distinct institutional frameworks influence the framing processes. While these formulations draw from various approaches that predominantly engage with discursive institutionalism, they exhibit subtle variations in their conceptual frameworks. Seidl (2022) characterizes those discursive actions of platforms as "narrative entrepreneurship."

On the other hand, another group of scholars has also explored how media discourse about the sharing economy among politicians and public officials can create "capture frames" that legitimize the interests of firms within the regulatory landscape (Adler, 2021). Works such as Altura et al. (2021) even argue that policy outcomes are influenced as much by framing processes on media as by institutional arrangements.

In conclusion, frame and discourse theory emerges as pertinent approaches here, mainly because the introduction of ride-hailing platforms in countries initiates public deliberations in which stakeholders craft narratives either in favor of or against regulation (Coiquad & Morissette, 2022; Lanamäki & Tuvikene, 2022).

## 4.2. Interests

A second dimension of analysis centers on the concerns and interests of various stakeholders in the gig economy, highlighting contentious claims, conflicts, and negotiation processes during regulatory attempts. Researchers employing this approach investigate how diverse interest groups mobilize and advocate for their interests in shaping platform regulation. They closely examine the power dynamics at play and the strategies employed by these groups. This investigation often includes the study of lobbying efforts, engagement and protest events by labor unions, consumer advocacy activities, and the influence of platform firms on regulatory decision-making.

Most studies focusing on platforms as influential corporations capable of shaping regulatory changes draw from critical political economy frameworks related to the study of business elites and state capture (Hardy, 2014). Although these works offer diverse perspectives on this phenomenon within the context of platform influence, they all share the commonality of being platform-centric. In other words, they consider platform firms the central actors of analysis and primary drivers affecting policy outcomes. From the standpoint of the power of platforms, the literature scrutinizes regulatory and political processes (Popiel, 2020).

Consequently, with minor variations, authors generally characterize platforms as "institutional entrepreneurs" whose primary objective, upon entering new countries and cities, is to alter legislation that obstructs the expansion of their business model. This phenomenon is often analyzed as policy or regulatory disruption. Within the domain of political economy, these conceptual frameworks are routinely employed to examine the intricate power dynamics deeply embedded within societies, institutions, and markets (Collier et al., 2018; Pelzer et al., 2019; Spicer et al., 2019; Distelmans & Scheerlinck, 2021; Garud, 2022).

An approach rooted in an interest's perspective aims to delve deeper into the various phases and political decision-making arenas where the regulatory debate unfolds and the responses to these demands in each country. In political science, one of the analytical methods that has gained increasing recognition in recent years is process tracing, which involves the qualitative examination of empirical evidence related to events, sequences, and connections within a specific case. It facilitates developing or testing hypotheses regarding the mechanisms that might explain a particular outcome, such as regulation (Bennet & Checkel, 2014).

This process-oriented perspective has become increasingly significant in understanding the variations within the gig economy across diverse local and national contexts worldwide. A typical starting point here is acknowledging that regulatory processes vary considerably depending on local factors. For instance, this variation is explicitly evident in the research conducted by Benli-Trichet and Kübler (2022) and Mazur and Serafin (2022), where they examine the regulatory procedures of ride-hailing platforms in distinct cities within the same country (intra-case comparisons). However, this approach is also prominent in seminal works such as Thelen (2018), which compares responses to Uber in the United States, Germany, and Switzerland (cross-case comparisons).

Furthermore, while some researchers concentrate on the strategies employed by platforms through conventional forms of business influence, such as lobbying, negotiation, or the mobilization of economic resources (often called *instrumental power*), others delve into the distinctive characteristics that define these firms and their central role within the countries and cities they operate (often called *structural power*). Thus, structural power primarily pertains to shaping comprehensive frameworks and regulatory systems within a given structure. In contrast, instrumental power is closely associated with the direct governance and enforcement of specific actions or policies (Busemeyer & Thelen, 2020).

Conversely, a third viewpoint, labeled "infrastructural power" by Valdez (2022), stems from the critical intermediary position held by platforms. Acting as intermediaries between producers, consumers, and information, platforms establish an ecosystem reliant on their presence as their primary influence source. This intermediary function extends to their sway over diverse economic actors, including consumers, producers, the labor force, and government bodies.

Considering these developments, authors have recently advocated for a convergence between approaches and the latest theoretical concepts in platform studies. They argue that platforms occupy a distinct stage of advanced capitalism that must align sufficiently with the political economy frameworks that emerged during the 1980s (Valdez, 2022). Consequently, works by scholars like Chan and Kwok (2021) and Mazur and Serafin (2022) hold significance as they position the influence strategies of platform firms in dialogue with other contemporary approaches like platformization and surveillance capitalism (Poell et al., 2019; Zuboff, 2019). In this context, the works of Culpepper and Thelen (2020) and Valdez (2022) are particularly influential in developing the concept of platform power for understanding TNCs and their regulatory influence.

Finally, but to a lesser degree, this perspective has also focused on the significance of political mobilization and the intricacies of contention that unfold within countries when platforms exploit the gaps or ambiguities inherent in existing legal frameworks. This literature draws from contentious politics and challenger-incumbent frameworks (Tzur, 2019) commonly referenced in collective actions and social movements studies. Here, the central focus of the analysis is on identifying actors within the regulatory field and the reception and strategic response to regulatory attempts (Thelen, 2018; Vasconcelos & Hall, 2021).

Likewise, this approach also considers stakeholder actions through institutional channels, particularly involving legal proceedings. A notable example in this regard is the case of the taxi drivers' union (Asociación Profesional Elite Taxi) in Barcelona, Spain. Through legal action, this association initiated a lawsuit in the Court of Justice, ultimately achieving the classification of smartphone application-based services that connect non-professional drivers and passengers as an integral component of a transportation service (Sieradzka, 2020).

This strategy, however, has yet to prove to be effective in all contexts, confirming that in the domain of platform regulation, the logic governing judicial processes differs from that of legislative settings. Unlike in legislative venues where legislators can establish pioneering laws, courts and administrative agencies are primarily concerned with assessing adherence to established statutes, regulations, and past judicial determinations (Collier et al., 2018). This variation underscores interactions naturally occurring between different approaches, like those involving the interests and actions of stakeholders and local institutions.

### 4.3. Institutions

The third analytical dimension emphasizes the critical role of established institutional frameworks, which encompass legal statutes, regulatory measures, and governmental systems at the national and local levels. It underscores that the existing institutional landscape can either facilitate or hinder the development and implementation of platform regulations. Researchers adopting this perspective delve into how these institutions' composition and effectiveness, including legal structures and governmental or autonomous regulatory bodies, influence the political landscape. This line of research often examines how disparities in institutional frameworks between countries or regions result in divergent responses to the gig economy, which makes it a field of exploration for comparative politics.

Focusing on TNCs, most of the works highlight the central role of pre-existing national institutions in shaping the trajectory of regulation in response to emerging platform-based technologies and services. Various factors, such as the rule of law, regulatory efficacy, the nature of political and economic institutions, adherence to international norms and obligations, and the density of regulation in specific sectors, particularly in urban areas already subject to extensive regulatory frameworks, are considered (Li & Ma, 2019; Occhiuto, 2022; Tzur, 2019).

For instance, the research by Kim and Suh (2021) focuses on the institutional and legal frameworks in countries where Uber launched, asserting that the evolution of the rule of law and the overall effectiveness of governmental market regulations serve as robust indicators for the regularization of this business model. Chan and Kwok (2021) assess the effectiveness of "guerrilla capitalism" strategies employed by the American corporation Uber in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, utilizing the conceptual framework of varieties of capitalism. This study examines the institutional dimension across nations characterized by varying degrees of institutionalization and distinct political regimes, providing a notable case study for a meticulous evaluation of the efficacy or inefficacy of political strategies employed by a U.S.-based enterprise within East Asian contexts.

Within specific political systems, variations in institutional contexts are evident, even within a single nation, particularly concerning the degree of autonomy granted to subnational entities. Tabascio and Brail (2022) shed light on this phenomenon by examining Canada's three major metropolitan regions: Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. Similarly, in China, where the central government sanctioned the operation of ride-hailing platforms in 2016,

discernible distinctions in governance authority and hierarchical levels significantly influence the outcomes of regulatory measures. In this context, municipal bodies are entrusted with formulating industry-governing policies and determining their stringency within different cities, each displaying varying degrees of regulatory rigor (Li & Ma, 2019). These findings underscore the importance of considering the level of governance as an indispensable institutional framework for regulating platforms from a multilevel perspective.

Lastly, this approach also addresses the influence of institutional legacies from traditional transportation industry regulations, underscoring the significant impact of diverse regulatory environments on the political maneuvering outcomes of platform companies (Zwick et al., 2022).

Table 1 briefly summarizes the three approaches, the most recurrent research questions, and the most common units of analysis found in the literature.

**Table 1. “The Three I’s” in the Current Research on the Politics of Policy Change in the TNC Market**

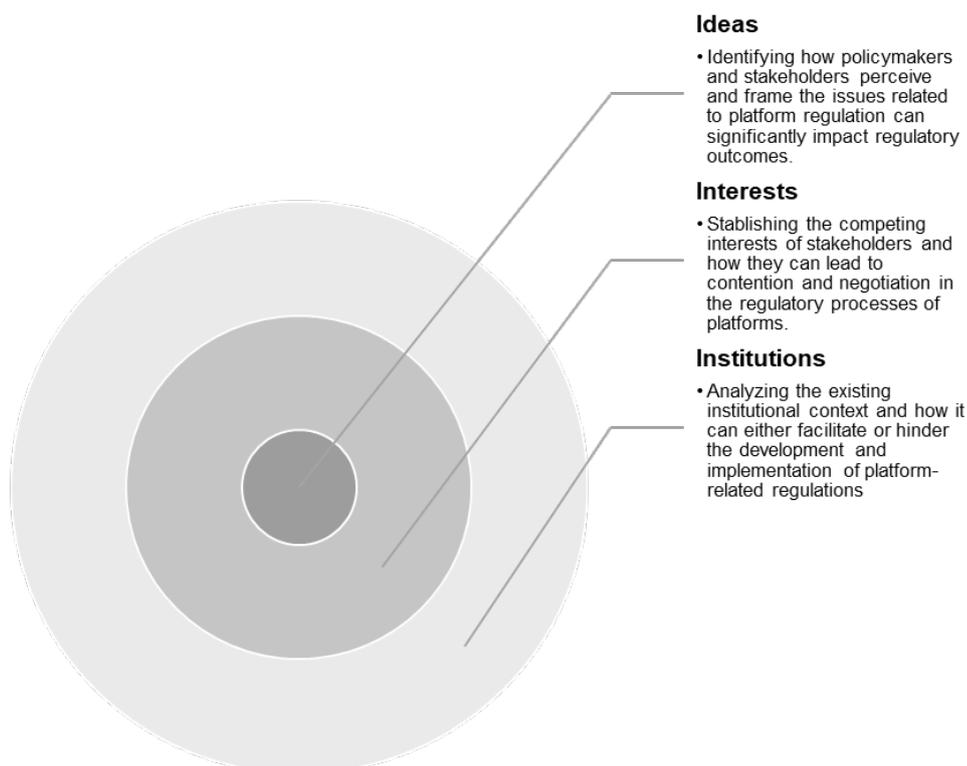
Dimension	Research Questions	Common Units of Analysis
<i>Ideas</i>	How do ideas navigate the discourse within the political arena and influence the policy-making process?	Public speeches and narratives in the press, as well as decision-making instances involving various stakeholders such as platform firms, government officials, or unions.
<i>Interests</i>	How do diverse interest groups politically mobilize and advocate for their interests in shaping platform regulation?	Lobbying efforts, engagement and protest events by labor unions, consumer advocacy activities, and the influence of platform firms on regulatory decision-making.
<i>Institutions</i>	How do the composition and effectiveness of institutions (including legal structures and governmental or autonomous regulatory bodies) influence the political landscape?	Changes in established institutional frameworks, which include legal statutes, regulatory measures, and government systems at both the national and local levels

Source: Author.

## 5. PLATFORM GOVERNANCE AS AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING POLICY CHANGE IN THE GIG ECONOMY

As we developed, the former three dimensions provide a structured framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of platform regulation. It helps scholars and policymakers identify and analyze the key factors and dynamics that shape regulatory outcomes within the gig economy. By considering these dimensions, researchers can conduct comprehensive analyses that consider the economic aspects of platform regulation and the sociopolitical and discursive elements. It underscores the field's interdisciplinary nature, where insights from political science, economics, communication studies, and law converge to provide a holistic understanding of platform governance (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Framing A Platform Governance Approach to TNCs in the Gig Economy**



Source: Author.

At the same time, the tripartite categorization underscores the necessity of a contingent or multifactorial approach to thoroughly investigate how regulatory narratives, actor interests, and institutional contexts intersect and mold policy responses and regulatory transformations in the evolution of the gig economy (Stein and Head, 2020). Hence, in alignment with Hall's (1997) approach, it is crucial to acknowledge that numerous academic works in comparative political economy frequently integrate multiple dimensions, mainly when fusing explanatory models encompassing two or three analytical methodologies.

For instance, in their comparative study of platform firms' institutional actions in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Egypt, Uzunca et al. (2018) considered both the level of institutionalization in these countries and stakeholders' responses to corporate influence strategies. Meanwhile, Zanatta and Kira (2018) and Li and Ma (2019) introduced a model that integrates an interest-based approach with institutional factors. Factors such as pressure from incumbent industries and the state of public transport development played significant roles in understanding the diverse contexts they studied. Benli-Trichet and Kübler (2022) extended this approach further, incorporating grassroots organizations' mobilization, platform-related issues, and the institutional agenda.

On the other hand, Chan and Kwok (2022) delved into how platforms wield power through discursive and political strategies. Their study gains relevance by comparing two sectoral platforms, DiDi and Uber, and elucidating their distinct relationships with various stakeholders, categorizing them as confrontational or collaborative models based on each platform's approach.

By adopting this approach, we can better navigate platform governance's complex and dynamic landscape. By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of regulatory challenges in the platform economy, we equip ourselves with a more robust analytical toolkit to address the evolving policy needs of our digital age (Wen, 2023). In essence, we move closer to crafting policies responsive to the challenges posed by platforms and adaptive to the ever-changing socio-political and economic contexts in which they operate.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

This article has sought to delve deeper into the intricate landscape of platform governance, shedding light on how the introduction of platforms has triggered complex political and governance challenges for national and local regulatory frameworks. In analyzing the governance of the gig economy, we have examined three critical political economy dimensions illuminating the field of study concerning TNC regulation.

Crucially, our analysis has dissected the dimensions of platform governance, focusing on three key facets: ideas, interests, and institutions. We have uncovered the pivotal role of ideas, discourses, and narratives in molding the regulatory response to platforms, emphasizing how these elements significantly shape the discourse and policy outcomes surrounding platform regulation. Additionally, we have scrutinized the competing interests of various stakeholders, including platform firms, workers, consumers, labor unions, and governments, illustrating how these interests spark contention and negotiation in the regulatory arena. Lastly, we have delved into the role of pre-existing institutional frameworks, laws, regulations, and government structures within countries, showcasing how these existing institutional contexts can either facilitate or hinder the development and implementation of platform-related regulations.

A limitation of this study lies in its primary objective, which is to establish a theoretical framework. For this reason, a systematic literature review has not been pursued. However, future research should consider this approach, with the goal of analytically and geographically mapping the growing body of scholarly work. Consequently, the literature we have explored consistently emphasizes a recurring concern: the imperative need for a comparative perspective to enhance our understanding of the forces that drive or impede platform regulation. This overarching conclusion underscores the significance of expanding our analytical horizons beyond single-case studies or isolated examinations of platform governance.

Despite the compelling rationale for comparative analysis, we must acknowledge a conspicuous gap in the current body of research: the need for more studies from the Global South (Carby-Hall & Mella, 2020). While scholarly inquiry has made substantial strides in investigating platform regulation, a significant underrepresentation of voices and perspectives from regions outside the Global North still needs to be addressed. This perspective would help reveal the asymmetric conditions between TNCs and developing states, which often face conditions that make the relationship with platform firms different from those in European countries or the United States (Bizberge et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the interplay between States, civil society, and the influence of TNCs in policy change is a dynamic and evolving field ripe for further exploration. Our framework calls for a robust research agenda that not only continues to dissect the multifaceted dimensions of platform governance but also considers the broader societal implications. By probing deeper into these intricate relationships and their evolving dynamics, scholars and policymakers can

better navigate the challenging terrain of platform regulation in more sectoral fields beyond urban transportation (van Dijck, 2021), ensuring that it aligns with the ever-evolving needs in the platform society.

## References

- ADLER, Laura. (2021). "Framing Disruption: How a Regulatory Capture Frame Legitimized the Deregulation of Boston's Ride-for-Hire Industry". *Socio-Economic Review*, 19(4), 1421–1450. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwab020>
- ALTURA, Thomas G, Yuki HASHIMOTO, Sanford M JACOBY, Kaoru KANAI, and Kazuro SAGUCHI. (2021). "Japan Meets the Sharing Economy: Contending Frames". *Social Science Japan Journal*, 24(1), 137–161. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ssjj/jyaa041>
- BARON, David (2018). "Disruptive Entrepreneurship and Dual Purpose Strategies: The Case of Uber". *Strategy Science*, 3(2), 439–462. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1287/stsc.2018.0059>
- BENLI-TRICHET, Marine, and Daniel KÜBLER (2022). "The Political Origins of Platform Economy Regulations. Understanding Variations in Governing Airbnb and Uber Across Cities in Switzerland". *Policy & Internet*, 14(4), 754. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.312>
- BENNETT, Andrew, and Jeffrey CHECKEL (Eds.). (2014). *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BILBIL, Ebru Tekin (2019). "New Governance and Digital Platform Companies: The Case of Uber". *International Journal of Public Administration in the Digital Age*, 6(2), 49–68. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4018/IJPADA.2019040104>
- BIZBERGE, Ana, Guillermo MASTRINI, and Rodrigo GÓMEZ. (2023). "Discussing Internet Platform Policy and Regulation in Latin America." *Journal of Digital Media & Policy*, 14(2): 135–48. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jdmp\\_00118\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1386/jdmp_00118_2).
- BLOCK, Jörn H., and Christian FISCH. (2020). "Eight Tips and Questions for Your Bibliographic Study in Business and Management Research." *Management Review Quarterly*, 70(3): 307–12. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-020-00188-4>.
- BUSEMEYER, Marius R, and Kathleen THELEN (2020). "Institutional Sources of Business Power". *World Politics*, 72(3), 448–480. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S004388712000009X>
- CARBY-HALL, Jo, and Lourdes MELLA (Eds.). (2020). *Labour Law and the Gig Economy: Challenges Posed by the Digitalisation of Labour Processes*. New York: Routledge.
- CARTWRIGHT, Madison (2021). "Historical Institutionalism and Technological Change: The Case of Uber". *Business and Politics*, 23(1), 67–90. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/bap.2019.23>
- CHAN, Ngai Keung and Chi KWOK (2021). "Guerilla Capitalism and the Platform Economy: Governing Uber in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong". *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(6), 780–796. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1909096>
- CHAN, Ngai Keung and Chi KWOK (2022). "The Politics of Platform Power in Surveillance Capitalism: A Comparative Case Study of Ride-Hailing Platforms in China and

- the United States". *Global Media and China*, 7(2), 131–150. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/20594364211046769>
- COIQUAUD, Urwana and Lucie MORISSETTE (2022). "The Politics of Uber in Quebec. A Discursive Institutional Study". *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, 61(1), 91–108. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/irel.12298>
- COLLIER, Ruth Berins, V.B. DUBAL, and Christopher L. CARTER. (2018). "Disrupting Regulation, Regulating Disruption: The Politics of Uber in the United States". *Perspectives on Politics*, 16(4), 919–937. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592718001093>
- COMUNELLO, Francesca and Simone MULARGIA (2023). "Does the "Platform Society" Mean the End of the "Network Society?" Reflections on Platforms and the Structure and Dynamics of Networks". *American Behavioral Scientist*, 67(7), 859–871. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642221092797>
- CULPEPPER, Pepper and Kathleen THELEN (2020). "Are We All Amazon Primed? Consumers and the Politics of Platform Power". *Comparative Political Studies*, 53(2), 288–318. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414019852687>
- DISTELMANS, Michaël and Ilse SCHEERLINCK (2021). "Institutional Strategies in the Ridesharing Economy: A Content Analysis Based on Uber's Example". *Sustainability*, 13(14), 8037. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13148037>
- FLEW, Terry (2019). "The Platformized Internet: Issues for Media Law and Policy". *SSRN Electronic Journal*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3395901>
- FLEW, Terry (2021). *Regulating Platforms*. Medford, MA: Polity Press.
- FLEW, Terry and Rosalie GILLET (2021). "Platform Policy: Evaluating Different Responses to the Challenges of Platform Power". *Journal of Digital Media & Policy*, 12(2), 231–246. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1386/jdmp\\_00061\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jdmp_00061_1)
- GARUD, Raghu, KUMARASWAMY, Arun, ROBERTS, Anna and Le XU (2022). "Liminal Movement by Digital Platform-Based Sharing Economy Ventures: The Case of Uber Technologies". *Strategic Management Journal*, 43(3), 447–475. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3148>
- GILLESPIE, Tarleton. (2010). "The Politics of 'Platforms'". *New Media & Society*, 12(3), 347–364. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738>
- GORWA, Robert. (2019a). "What Is Platform Governance?" *Information, Communication & Society*, 22(6), 854–871. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1573914>
- GORWA, Robert. (2019b). "The Platform Governance Triangle: Conceptualising the Informal Regulation of Online Content". *Internet Policy Review*, 8(2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.2.1407>
- HAGGART, Blayne, Natasha TUSIKOV, and Jan SCHOLTE, (Eds.) (2021). *Power and Authority in Internet Governance: Return of the State?* New York: Routledge.
- HALL, Peter A. (1997). "Institutions, Interests and Ideas in the Comparative Political Economy of the Industrialized Nations". In M. I. LICHBACH & A. S. ZUCKERMAN (Eds.), *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture and Structure* (pp. 174–207). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- HARDY, Jonathan. (2014). *Critical Political Economy of the Media: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge.

- HEIN, Andreas, Maximilian SCHREIECK, Tobias RIASANOW, David Soto SETZKE, Manuel WIESCHE, Markus BÖHM, and Helmut KRCCMAR (2020). “Digital Platform Ecosystems”. *Electronic Markets*, 30(1), 87–98. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12525-019-00377-4>
- HELMOND, Anne. (2015). “The Platformization of the Web: Making Web Data Platform Ready”. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), 1–11. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115603080>
- INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISTS. (2022). The Uber Files—ICIJ. <https://www.icij.org/investigations/uber-files/>.
- KESSLER, Sarah. (2019). *Gigged: The Gig Economy, the End of the Job and the Future of Work*. London: Random House Business Books.
- KIM, Hyun and Chan SUH (2021). “Spreading the Sharing Economy: Institutional Conditions for the International Diffusion of Uber, 2010-2017”. *PLOS ONE*, 16(3), 1–14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0248038>
- LANAMÄKI, Arto and Tauri TUVIKENE (2022). “Framing Digital Future: Selective Formalization and Legitimation of Ridehailing Platforms in Estonia”. *Geoforum*, 136, 283–292. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2021.01.016>
- LEERSEN, Paddy (2021). “Platform Governance”. In BELLI, L.; ZINGALES, N. and CURZI, Y. (Eds.), *Glossary of Platform Law and Policy Terms* (online). FGV Direito Rio. <https://platformglossary.info/platform-governance/>
- LEHMANN, Julian, Florian WEBER, Matthias WALDKIRCH, Lorenz GRAF-VLACHY, and Andreas KÖNIG (2022). “Institutional Work Battles in the Sharing Economy: Unveiling Actors and Discursive Strategies in Media Discourse”. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 184, 1–15. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2022.122002>
- LI, Yanwei and Liang MA (2019). “What Drives the Governance of Ridesharing? A Fuzzy-Set QCA of Local Regulations in China”. *Policy Sciences*, 52(4), 601–624. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-019-09359-x>
- MAZUR, Joanna and Marcin SERAFIN (2022). “Stalling the State: How Digital Platforms Contribute to and Profit from Delays in the Enforcement and Adoption of Regulations”. *Comparative Political Studies*, 56(1), 101-130. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140221089651>
- NESS, Immanuel. (Ed.). (2023). *The Routledge Handbook of the Gig Economy*. New York: Routledge
- OCCHIUTO, Nicholas (2022). “Enabling Disruptive Innovations: A Comparative Case Study of Uber in New York City, Chicago and San Francisco”. *Socio-Economic Review*, 20(4), 1881–1903. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwab056>
- PELZER, Peter, FRENKEN, Koen and Wouter BOON (2019). “Institutional Entrepreneurship in the Platform Economy: How Uber Tried (and Failed) to Change the Dutch Taxi Law”. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 33, 1–12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2019.02.003>
- POELL, Thomas, NIEBORG, David and José VAN DIJCK (2019). “Platformisation”. *Internet Policy Review*, 8(4), 1–13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1425>
- POPIEL, Pawel (2020). “Addressing Platform Power: The Politics of Competition Policy”. *Journal of Digital Media & Policy*, 11(3), 341–360. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jdmp\\_00029\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jdmp_00029_1)

- PRASSL, Jeremias (2018). *Humans as a Service: The Promise and Perils of Work in the Gig Economy*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- RAHMAN, K. Sabeel and Kathleen THELEN (2019). “The Rise of the Platform Business Model and the Transformation of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism”. *Politics & Society*, 47(2), 177–204. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329219838932>
- RAVENELLE, Alexandra (2019). *Hustle and Gig: Struggling and Surviving in the Sharing Economy*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- SEIDL, Timo (2020). “The Politics of Platform Capitalism: A Case Study on the Regulation of Uber in New York”. *Regulation & Governance*, 16(2), 357-374. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12353>
- SIERADZKA, Małgorzata. (2020). “Asociación Profesional Elite Taxi vs Uber Systems Spain SL: Differences between the Internet Platform and the Transport Service.” *Journal of European Competition Law & Practice*, 11(5–6): 263–66. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeclap/lpaa031>.
- SNELLEN, Daniëlle and Guus DE HOLLANDER, G. (2017). “ICT’s Change Transport and Mobility: Mind the Policy Gap!” *Transportation Research Procedia*, 26, 3–12. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trpro.2017.07.003>
- SPICER, Zachary, Gabriel EIDELMAN, and Austin ZWICK (2019). “Patterns of Local Policy Disruption: Regulatory Responses to Uber in Ten North American Cities”. *Review of Policy Research*, 36(2), 146–167. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ropr.12325>
- SRNICEK, Nick (2016). *Platform Capitalism*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- STEIN, Elliot and Brian HEAD (2020). “Uber in Queensland: From Policy Fortress to Policy Change”. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 79(4), 462–479. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8500.12416>
- TABASCIO, Alexander and Shauna BRAIL (2022). “Governance Matters: Regulating Ride Hailing Platforms in Canada’s Largest City-Regions”. *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe Canadien*, 66(2), 278–292. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/cag.12705>
- THELEN, Kathleen (2018). “Regulating Uber: The Politics of the Platform Economy in Europe and the United States”. *Perspectives on Politics*, 16(4), 938–953. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592718001081>
- TUCKER, Eric (2020). “Towards a Political Economy of Platform-Mediated Work”. *Studies in Political Economy*, 101(3), 185–207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07078552.2020.1848499>
- TZUR, Amit (2019). “Uber Über Regulation? Regulatory Change Following the Emergence of New Technologies in the Taxi Market”. *Regulation & Governance*, 13(3), 340–361. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12170>
- UMNEY, Charles, Mark STUART, Ioulia BESSA, Simon JOYCE, Denis NEUMANN, and Vera TRAPPMANN (2023). “Platform Labour Unrest in a Global Perspective: How, Where and Why Do Platform Workers Protest”. *Work, Employment and Society*, Ahead of Print.
- UZUNCA, Bilgehan, J. P. COEN RIGTERING, and Pinar OZCAN (2018). “Sharing and Shaping: A Cross-Country Comparison of How Sharing Economy Firms Shape Their Institutional Environment to Gain Legitimacy”. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 4(3), 248–272. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2016.0153>

- VALDEZ, Jimena. (2022). "The Politics of Uber: Infrastructural Power in the United States and Europe". *Regulation & Governance*, 17, 177–194. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12456>
- VAN DIJCK, José. (2021). "Seeing the Forest for the Trees: Visualizing Platformization and Its Governance". *New Media & Society*, 23(9), 2801–2819. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820940293>
- VAN DIJCK, José, POELL, Thomas and Martijn de WAAL (2018). *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- WEN, Yuni (2023). "Rightful Resistance: How Do Digital Platforms Achieve Policy Change?" *Technology in Society*, 74, Ahead of Print. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2023.102266>
- WINSECK, Dwayne (2020). "Vampire Squids, 'the Broken Internet' and Platform Regulation. *Journal of Digital Media & Policy*, 11(3), 241–282. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1386/jdmp\\_00025\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jdmp_00025_1)
- WOOD, Alex and Vili LEHDONVIRTA (2021). "Antagonism Beyond Employment: How the 'Subordinated Agency' of Labour Platforms Generates Conflict in the Remote Gig Economy". *Socio-Economic Review*, 19(4), 1369–1396. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwab016>
- WOODCOCK, Jamie (2021). *The Fight Against Platform Capitalism: An Inquiry into the Global Struggles of the Gig Economy*. London, UK: University of Westminster Press.
- WOODCOCK, Jamie and Mark GRAHAM (2020). *The Gig Economy: A Critical Introduction*. Medford, MA: Polity Press.
- ZUBOFF, Shoshana (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- ZWICK, Austin, SPICER, Zachary and Mischa YOUNG (2022). "Moving Ideas? The News Media's Impact on Ridehailing Regulation in Canadian Cities". *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 1–17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2022.2053332>