

My research lies at the intersection of economic sociology, political sociology, and science and technology studies, and is motivated by an interest in the way digital technologies are reshaping our world on two related registers. The first concerns the way these technologies shape economic, social, political, and cultural processes and phenomena. The second is more conceptual and deals with how computational ideas seem to be altering basic categories—the state, the citizen, the person—that we use to grasp these aforementioned processes and phenomena.

My dissertation, *The Cybernetic State: Digital Statecraft in the EU, India, and Singapore*, investigates how digitalization shapes relations among states, markets, and citizens. I explore the linkage of digital identity systems with digital payment systems by considering three paradigmatic instances of this linkage. In each case, I am interested in what is being done, and by whom; how it is being done; why it is being done; and how it differs from what was happening before. Drawing on a variety of methods—comparative historical and institutional analysis, archival work, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation—I recount the histories of these projects and the changing constellation of actors and institutions that develop and implement them.

With the generous support of the IRIS Award, I was able to carry out a summer of fieldwork in Singapore to gather data for my dissertation's Singaporean case. Singapore is an ideal setting in which to study these changes, as it has been developing its digital initiatives for over a decade under the ambit of its Smart Nation program. During my time in Singapore, I was able to conduct expert interviews with academics, activists, policy officials, government workers, and representatives from the worlds of tech and finance. These interviews taught me a great deal about the government's digitalization projects and their relation to its overall strategy of development. Some of my interviewees also passed along internal documents, reports, and whitepapers that enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of the project than would otherwise have been possible. When not conducting interviews, I spent much time in the excellent (and, thankfully, well-air conditioned) Singapore National Library, consulting government files, records, and documents. These have been most valuable for my research and have provided the primary source material I will need to support the arguments I wish to make in my dissertation.

My time in Singapore coincided with the International Association for Media and Communication Research 2025 annual conference, at which I was able to present some of my research. This provided further valuable feedback and opportunities to build connections with scholars of digital technology and politics from around the world. While there, I connected with academics not only from Singapore, but also from Europe, Australia, and China. I learned a great deal from my conversations with these global scholars, from whom I gleaned many valuable insights. I was also very fortunate that not one but two of my colleagues from the UW-Madison sociology department were in the country at the same time as I. Because this was my first time in Singapore, the presence of a few friendly faces

was greatly appreciated, and I availed myself of their practical knowledge concerning navigating the country, and, even more importantly, their restaurant recommendations.

While I spent a great deal of time working, I also made sure to schedule some time to visit Singapore's many museums and historical sites. I learned much from these visits, both from taking in the exhibits, and from my causal conversations from the employees, and tour guides, all of whom were unfailingly kind and exceptionally generous with their time. In my free time, I enjoyed simply wandering the city, drinking in Singapore's rich multiethnic heritage and the character of its varied neighborhoods. I learned much from these more quotidian activities and gained insight and understanding that I could not have found in the archives.

My research conducted in Singapore will allow me to contribute to a number of debates, both of academic interest and contemporary importance, which I briefly sketch here.

While many have argued that the state's traditional power and authority, and the rights and duties associated with citizenship have been unbundled and redistributed to private firms, NGOs, and supranational institutions, we know much less about how digitalization affects these changes. This is a significant lacuna that my work aims to address.

But I also aim to grapple with a more profound question: Does the fact that we observe similar initiatives around the world augur a convergence between democratic and non-democratic societies, toward some form of "new despotism" (Keane 2020)? Contra scholars who imply a singular quasi-Hegelian digitalization process producing similar effects everywhere, my work instead suggests that we find similar technologies harnessed in the service of different normative visions and used to enact distinctive projects of modernity.

In what do these consist? Some scholars have noted a recent shift from nationalist to "civilizationalist" discourse, while others have suggested we are witnessing the rise of postliberal "civilizational states". While there have been calls for comparative and historical studies of civilizations, empires, and digitality, much work remains to be done to link such analyses with recent technological and geopolitical developments. I take up this scholarly gauntlet in the service of the larger project of building a truly global sociology of the digital.

The stakes of this inquiry are not merely academic, as this "civilizationalist" discourse represents a fundamental ideational challenge to the liberal international order. As societies around the world shift in a postliberal direction, charting the changing nature of their governance is an urgent task. Because my research deals with settings that display features of postliberal governance, it is well-positioned to contribute to urgent questions concerning the future of liberal democracy—and what may be coming to replace it.