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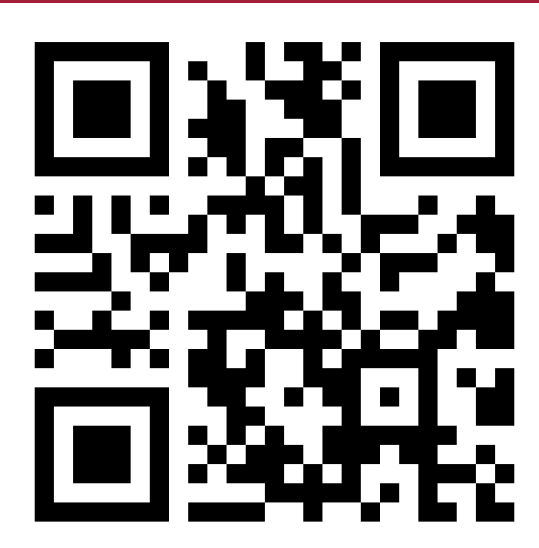
Institutskolloquium / DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR

A world of wannabe leapfrogs? Competition statehood in global tech races

Wednesday, 29 April 2026 · 16:00 c.t.

Room 124, Institute of Political Science (IfP)

Or join online via Zoom: 930 8975 0663 (Meeting ID), 142311 (Passcode)



As leading companies and governments in the US and China dominate global digital technology markets and capture most economic gains, other parts of the world seem to face a stark choice: catch-up with the leaders or be left behind. This logic has driven a global turn toward competitiveness-oriented digital technology policies and discourses, visible in more than 70 national AI strategies and major investments in areas like quantum computing or cloud infrastructure from Europe and India to Brazil and the United Arab Emirates. The simultaneous concentration of power at the top and the rise of numerous runners-up raises the question of what “catching up” with the US and China really entails for state transformation.

Drawing on our book *The AI Matrix* (2026, Agenda, open access) and my work in critical political economy, the lecture develops the concept of technological competition statehood, examining how an updated form of Phil Cerny’s competition state is reconfigured under US-Chinese tech dominance. Drawing on economic geography notions of variegated capitalism, I argue that even if the weaponization of digital markets strongly shapes global economies and politics, it also creates openings for region-specific competitiveness strategies and local projects. As runners-up combine targeted investments, regulatory measures, public procurement, and normative positionings vis-à-vis the leaders, a variegated landscape of regionally specific and globally connected competition states emerges. I illustrate this pattern with preliminary examples from Europe, India, and Brazil.



Astrid Duenkelmann/MPIfG

Regine Paul is Professor at the Department of Government at Bergen University (Norway, on partial leave) and Research Group Leader at the Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne where she is currently building up a new group on “Technology and Statehood”. She is co-editor of *Critical Policy Studies* and the *Elgar Handbook on Public Policy and Artificial Intelligence* (2024), as well as co-author of *The AI Matrix: Profits, Power, Politics* (2026, with Daniel Mügge and Vali Stan).

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For more information

