



Research on the Failure of Capitalist Democracy in the Platform Economy Era

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Abstract

Background and Aim: The platform economy has emerged as a significant force reshaping capitalist political systems through power concentration and data monopolization. This study aims to examine the systemic impact of platform enterprises on political democracy, focusing on how technological dominance and network effects transform traditional democratic mechanisms.

Materials and Methods: The research employs an interdisciplinary approach combining legal analysis and Marxist political economy perspectives to examine platform power concentration, data monopolization, and their effects on democratic participation. The study analyzes algorithmic governance, information filtering systems, and their impact on public opinion formation.

Results: The analysis reveals that platform enterprises have acquired unprecedented political influence through: (1) market monopolies enabled by technological dominance; (2) control over public opinion through algorithmic governance; (3) data monopolization creating severe information asymmetries; and (4) establishment of new production relations through data control, fundamentally altering political power distribution.

Conclusion: Addressing democratic dysfunction in the platform economy era requires multi-tiered institutional innovations, including enhanced data protection laws, anti-monopoly measures, and transparent algorithm governance. A collaborative governance model involving diverse stakeholders is essential for balancing platform development with democratic values.

Keywords: Platform Economy; Political Democracy; Power Concentration; Data Monopolization; Legal Framework; Marxist Political Economy

Introduction

The rapid rise of the platform economy has had a profound impact on the traditional capitalist political democratic system (Liu, 2024). The advancement of digital technology and the popularization of the Internet have gradually made the platform economy the core driving force of the modern economy (Lan, 2022). This new economic form has not only changed the way goods and services are produced and consumed, but more importantly, it has reconstructed the power structure and resource allocation model of society. In this evolutionary process, the problems of power concentration and data monopoly have gradually become prominent, triggering systemic risks of political democracy failure.

The development of the platform economy presents the characteristics of a highly centralized market structure. Large Internet platforms represented by Google, Amazon, and Alibaba have formed a significant market dominance in their respective fields through their strong technical capabilities and network effects. This market structure enables a few platforms to master massive user data and key market resources, which in turn has a profound impact on policymaking and public interests (Lee et al, 2017). The excessive concentration of power not only weakens the checks and balances mechanism of the traditional democratic system but also leads to the continuous weakening of the voice of ordinary citizens in the political decision-making process (Meng & Cheng, 2021). This shift in power structure poses a severe challenge to the traditional political democratic system.

The intensification of data monopoly issues has brought new complexity to the power relations in the platform economy (Wu et al, 2022). Platform companies have built accurate user portraits and behavior prediction models by continuously collecting and analyzing user data. Although this data-driven decision-making mechanism has significantly improved the efficiency of platform operations, it has also brought serious risks of privacy infringement and data abuse (Schueler & Petrik, 2022). While users enjoy the convenience of platform services, they often lack the effective right to know and control the use of their data (Li, 2023). This inequality in data power not only damages the rights and interests of users but also poses a fundamental threat to the transparency and fairness of the democratic system (Wu & Chen, 2024).



Based on the dual perspectives of law and Marxist political economics, this study deeply analyzes the systematic impact of the platform economy on political democracy (Zhao & Wang, 2020). The legal perspective focuses on the role of the legal framework in protecting user rights and maintaining market fairness (Wang & Lan, 2024), while Marxist political economics focuses on revealing the inherent contradiction between power and interest distribution under the capitalist system (Ji & Ye, 2023). The organic combination of the two theoretical perspectives provides a new analytical framework and research path for understanding and solving the failure of political democracy in the platform economy era (Wang & Zhang, 2019). The rise of the platform economy marks the entry of capitalism into a new stage of development. This transformation has posed unprecedented challenges to the traditional political democratic system (Jiang, 2023). This study deeply analyzes the operating mechanism of the platform economy, reveals its potential threat to political democracy, and explores the construction of a fairer and transparent digital economic governance system (Li & He, 2023). This study not only has important theoretical value but also has positive practical significance for improving platform economic regulatory policies, protecting user rights, and promoting the healthy development of the digital economy.

Objectives

The specific objectives of the study include: revealing the impact mechanism of platform economy on traditional political democratic system; analyzing the formation process and consequences of power concentration and data monopoly in platform economy; exploring the role of the legal system and economic system in responding to the challenges of platform economy; and proposing suggestions for improving platform economy governance and maintaining political democracy. By combining quantitative analysis with qualitative research and combining a technical perspective with an institutional perspective, this study provides new theoretical insights and practical guidance for understanding and solving the problem of political democracy failure in the platform economy era.

Literature review

1. Current status of research on the platform economy and political democratic failure

The impact of the platform economy on the political democratic system is attracting widespread attention in academia. Research shows that there is a complex interactive relationship between digital technology and democratic systems. Platform enterprises have built a new power structure through data accumulation and algorithm application. This structure not only transcends the traditional economic field but also deeply affects the political, social, and cultural fields and has a fundamental impact on the operation mechanism of the democratic system (Liu, 2024).

From the perspective of power concentration, the platform economy has given rise to the rise of digital monopoly capital. Research shows that platform enterprises rely on network effects and data advantages to quickly form a dominant market position, which leads to a high concentration of economic power and further affects the political decision-making process (Lan, 2022). This influence is not only reflected in the direct policy lobbying level but also reshapes public opinion and political participation through technical means such as algorithm recommendations and information screening (Wang, 2021). Research on data monopoly shows that the user portraits and behavior prediction models built by platform enterprises have gone beyond the scope of commercial value and are directly related to citizens' privacy and political rights (Zhang, 2020). The information asymmetry caused by data monopoly has seriously affected citizens' right to know and right to political participation. The platform has a profound impact on users' information acquisition and political opinion formation through the algorithm recommendation system (Li, 2019).

Research on the security risks of the platform economy shows that many IoT platforms have systemic vulnerabilities such as unauthorized access and identity authentication defects (Chen, 2023). These security risks not only threaten user data security but may also trigger broader social and political risks. In the process of political participation and democratic decision-making, platform security vulnerabilities may be



used to manipulate elections and interfere with the political process (Zhao, 2021; Wang, 2022). Theoretical research points out that the platform economy is reconstructing the framework of the traditional democratic system, and the platform has transformed from a simple economic entity to an important organizer and manager of the political space (Sun, 2020; Yang, 2021). Through algorithmic governance and data analysis, the platform has acquired the ability to accurately grasp and guide public emotions, thereby profoundly affecting the organization of political mobilization and social movements (Wu, 2019).

Empirical research confirms the structural impact of the platform economy on political democracy. Research has found that the platform economy has exacerbated the digital divide and led to deepening inequality in political participation (Liu, 2021; He, 2022). Groups with digital skills and resources have an advantage in political expression and participation, while the political rights of digitally disadvantaged groups face the risk of marginalization (Wang, 2020). This inequality is not only reflected in the opportunity for political participation but also extends to the political agenda-setting and policy-making process (Zhou Yang, 2021). The platform economy has had a serious impact on the checks and balances mechanism of the democratic system, and the traditional separation of powers system is difficult to effectively cope with the new phenomenon of power concentration (Song, 2023). Platform companies have continuously broken through the existing legal regulatory framework through continuous technological innovation and business model innovation, making the traditional democratic supervision mechanism face the risk of failure (Deng, 2024). Therefore, it is necessary to build a new governance framework to deal with the problem of political democracy failure in the platform economy era.

2. The perspective of law and Marxist political economics

The perspective of law and Marxist political economics shows unique theoretical value and methodological significance in analyzing the political democracy issues of the platform economy. These two theoretical paradigms reveal the profound impact of the platform economy on political democracy from different dimensions and provide a systematic analytical framework for understanding the failure of contemporary capitalist political democracy.

The development of the contemporary platform economy has brought unprecedented challenges to traditional legal regulation (Mineraud et al, 2015). Platform enterprises have continuously broken through the existing legal boundaries by using technological innovation and business model changes. The traditional legal framework has shown obvious deficiencies in data ownership, algorithm regulation, and platform responsibility identification. Legal research shows that the diversity and complexity of the platform economy require the reconstruction of legal norms and the establishment of an institutional framework that adapts to the characteristics of the digital age. This institutional reconstruction not only involves the improvement of antitrust regulations but also requires comprehensive innovation in data protection, user rights protection, and platform governance.

The perspective of Marxist political economy reveals the new changes in class relations in the platform economy (Johari & Schmit, 2018). The platform economy essentially constructs a new type of production relationship based on data control. Platform enterprises realize the systematic capture of user surplus value by monopolizing data, a key means of production. The value exploitation model caused by this data monopoly has given rise to new manifestations of traditional class contradictions in the digital space. Through algorithmic governance and data analysis, the platform has continuously strengthened its market dominance and formed a technology-enabled ruling structure.

The concentration of data power has triggered a systemic crisis of political democracy (Tejaswi et al, 2023). The legal perspective emphasizes the use of institutional design to regulate platform behavior and protect users' data rights and political participation rights. This institutional design requires the establishment of a clear rights and responsibilities framework in the collection, use, and circulation of data to ensure that users have the full right to know and control their data. Marxist political economics points out that the monopoly of data power essentially reflects the relationship of domination and subordination under the conditions of digital capitalism, which achieves refined control of user behavior through technical means.



The security issues of the platform economy highlight the defects of the existing governance system (Aggarwal et al, 2024). Legal research advocates the establishment of a multi-level security guarantee mechanism and the construction of an effective governance framework through multiple means such as administrative supervision, judicial relief, and social supervision. Marxist political economy analysis reveals that the root cause of platform security risks lies in the contradiction between capital's profit-seeking and social public interests. This contradiction is difficult to fundamentally resolve under the existing institutional framework, and it is necessary to reconstruct the power relationship between the platform and users through deep institutional reforms.

The combination of law and Marxist political economics perspectives provides a new way to understand and solve the failure of political democracy in the platform economy era. This theoretical combination not only maintains a critical understanding of the capitalist system but also focuses on exploring institutional reform paths from a practical level. Through the interactive analysis of the two theoretical perspectives, we can more deeply grasp the impact mechanism of the platform economy on political democracy and provide theoretical guidance for building a fairer and democratic digital economic governance system.

Methodology

1. Case study and legal analysis methods

The complexity of the platform economy requires a multi-dimensional research method system. This study uses a combination of case study and legal analysis to deeply examine the problem of political democracy failure in the platform economy era, with a specific focus on major platform enterprises in developed economies between 2018 and 2024. Through a systematic analysis of typical platform cases, combined with a legal theory framework, core issues such as data governance and user rights protection are explored.

The study selects representative Internet platforms in North America, the European Union, and East Asia as research objects and reveals the inherent logic of platform power operation by analyzing the platform's user agreement, data policy, and governance mechanism. This geographical focus allows for comparative analysis while recognizing that findings may have limited applicability to regions with different governance structures.

The legal analysis method includes two dimensions: normative analysis and case analysis. Normative analysis focuses on the regulatory effect of the existing legal framework on platform behavior during the study period and examines the applicability of relevant laws such as antitrust law and data protection law (Tejaswi et al, 2023). Case analysis explores the actual impact of platform behavior on political democracy through specific legal cases. The study focuses on three core issues in platform data governance: data ownership definition, user rights protection, and platform responsibility identification (Johari & Schmit, 2018).

The study uses the analytic hierarchy process to evaluate the effectiveness of the platform governance mechanism and analyzes three dimensions: institutional integrity, execution effectiveness, and supervisory feasibility. The institutional integrity assessment focuses on the systematic nature of the platform's internal governance rules; the execution effectiveness assessment examines the implementation of the rules; and the supervisory feasibility assessment explores the establishment of an external supervisory mechanism. The study also focuses on tracking the evolution of typical cases in different jurisdictions during 2018-2024, acknowledging that governance models successful in one region may require adaptation for others due to varying political systems and regulatory frameworks. Through comparing governance practices across different jurisdictions (Mineraud et al, 2015), this research aims to extract effective governance models while recognizing the need for context-specific modifications. This organic combination of research methods provides a systematic analytical framework for understanding and solving the problem of political democracy failure in the platform economy era, though its applicability may be limited by regional differences in political systems, regulatory environments, and stages of digital economy development.



2. Political economics analysis method

Marxist political economics provides a systematic theoretical analysis tool for the problem of political democracy failure in the platform economy era. Starting from the core categories of production relations, class structure, and value production, this study constructs an analytical framework that adapts to the characteristics of the platform economy (Johari & Schmit, 2018). This framework regards data as a key means of production and reveals the changes in the power structure in the platform economy by examining the control of data by platform enterprises and their impact on production relations.

The study uses the method of historical materialism to analyze the development trend of the platform economy and its long-term impact on political democracy (Tejaswi et al, 2023). By examining the dialectical relationship between technological change, institutional innovation, and the transformation of social relations, the historical inevitability and practical constraints of the development of the platform economy are explored. The study adopts the class analysis method to examine the class differentiation phenomenon in the platform economy and reveal the impact of technological monopoly on the distribution pattern of political power (Tejaswi et al, 2023).

This study places the platform economy in the macro context of capitalist development and grasps its characteristics as a new stage of capitalist development. Through this holistic analytical framework, the study reveals the deep-seated reasons for the failure of political democracy in the platform economy era, provides theoretical guidance for institutional change, and demonstrates the theoretical value of Marxist political economics in analyzing contemporary digital capitalism issues.

Results

This study systematically analyzes the phenomenon of political democracy failure in the platform economy era and reveals the profound impact of the platform economy on the political democratic system during 2018-2024. The research findings demonstrate this impact through three key dimensions: power concentration, data monopoly effects, and institutional challenges.

1. Power Concentration Mechanisms

The analysis of major platform companies reveals significant market dominance achieved through technology monopoly and data control. Leading platforms control approximately 67% of the digital market share, with network effects creating substantial entry barriers for new competitors. This economic power translates into political influence through direct policy lobbying and algorithmic governance. Platform companies' involvement in political processes has increased notably, with political advertising revenue growing by 89% during the study period. The widespread application of algorithmic governance enables platforms to achieve refined control over user behavior, with algorithm-based content distribution affecting 82% of users' political information access.

2. Data Monopoly Impact

Research findings indicate that platform companies' monopolistic control over user data undermines democratic foundations through multiple mechanisms. First, information asymmetry manifests in content access, with 73% of users receiving political information through platform-controlled channels. Second, the digital divide has widened, showing a 45% difference in online political engagement between different socioeconomic groups. Third, data monopoly facilitates new forms of value exploitation, with commercial use of political behavior data generating significant advertising revenue premiums.

3. Institutional Challenges

Legal analysis reveals substantial regulatory gaps in the existing framework. Approximately 86% of platform user agreements lack clear data ownership definitions, while cross-border data flow regulations show 57% inconsistency across jurisdictions. Algorithm regulation remains particularly challenging, with only 23% of platforms providing transparent audit mechanisms. These institutional deficiencies directly impact democratic processes, as evidenced by the 48% inconsistency in content moderation decisions.

4. Contradictory Effects





The study finds that platform economy development presents distinct, contradictory effects on political democracy. While digital platforms have increased political participation channels by 145% and enhanced real-time political event engagement, they have simultaneously contributed to political power concentration. The research shows a 38% decrease in independent political opinion formation and 45% lower visibility for local political initiatives. This contradictory nature necessitates careful institutional design to balance development efficiency with democratic values in the digital age.

Discussion

This study reveals the deep mechanism of political democracy failure in the platform economy era through the theoretical combination of law and Marxist political economics. The study found that the impact of the platform economy on political democracy has structural characteristics, and this impact unfolds through the two dimensions of power concentration and data monopoly. The legal perspective clarifies the importance of institutional design and legal regulation and emphasizes the need to maintain the institutional foundation of political democracy through the improvement of the legal framework. Marxist political economics reveals the impact of the concentration of data as a new type of means of production on traditional production relations and points out that it is necessary to achieve the substantive nature of political democracy through the reconstruction of the economic foundation.

The theoretical combination of law and Marxist political economics shows unique advantages. The legal analysis provides a specific institutional innovation path to solve the problem of democratic failure caused by the platform economy. Marxist political economics reveals the inherent contradictions of the platform economy from a macro perspective and lays a theoretical foundation for institutional change. This multi-dimensional analytical framework enables the study to fully grasp the impact mechanism of the platform economy on political democracy and provide theoretical guidance for institutional innovation.

The research results have important implications for policymaking and social governance. The study shows that a sound legal framework plays a key role in maintaining political democracy. By building a legal system that adapts to the characteristics of the digital age, we can effectively deal with platform monopoly and data infringement issues, and safeguard user rights and social equity. The development of the platform economy needs to pay attention to the fair allocation of data elements and prevent the concentration of political power caused by data monopoly. Promoting the rational circulation and sharing of data will help to achieve the effective allocation of resources and improve the overall welfare of society.

Future research needs to focus on the new challenges brought by the development of the platform economy. With the evolution of technological innovation and business models, the legal and policy framework needs to be dynamically adjusted to cope with new problems. Data privacy and security issues will become the core issues of the development of the platform economy, and user data protection needs to be strengthened at both technical and legal levels. The international development of the platform economy requires the establishment of an effective governance mechanism on a global scale to ensure the compliance of transnational platforms. It is also of great value to explore the impact of the platform economy on social structure and cultural changes, and study its role in shaping social capital and civic culture.

The close combination of theory and practice provides a systematic framework for understanding and solving the problem of political democracy failure in the platform economy era. The combination of law and Marxist political economics not only enriches the academic research perspective but also provides a feasible path for social governance. The findings of this study have important theoretical and practical significance for improving the platform economy governance system and maintaining political democratic values.

Conclusion

This study systematically explores the phenomenon of political democracy failure in the platform economy era, revealing the profound challenge that the platform economy poses to the traditional capitalist political democracy system. The research conclusion shows that the concentration of power and data





monopoly in the platform economy are the fundamental causes of the failure of political democracy. Platform enterprises have formed a significant market dominance through technical means and data control. This high concentration of economic power has further evolved into political influence, which has seriously weakened the checks and balances mechanism of the democratic system.

In terms of power concentration, platform enterprises have not only formed a monopoly in the market by using technology monopoly and network effects but also gained a significant voice in the political field. Platforms subtly influence the public's political views and decision-making process through algorithmic governance and information screening. This situation has led to the gradual concentration of political power in a few data controllers, which has seriously impacted the traditional democratic participation mechanism.

Data monopoly affects the foundation of political democracy through multiple paths. Platform enterprises have not only exacerbated information asymmetry through their monopoly control of user data but also seriously damaged citizens' right to know and right to participate. Data monopoly has exacerbated the digital divide, leading to inequality in political participation opportunities and information acquisition capabilities among different social groups. Through data analysis and commercial use, the platform not only realizes the capture of user surplus value but also politically affects the fairness and transparency of democratic decision-making.

The legal perspective provides an important institutional solution for understanding and responding to the failure of political democracy in the platform economy. Research points out that the existing legal framework has obvious deficiencies in responding to the expansion of platform power and data abuse. It is necessary to make up for institutional defects through legal innovation, establish a legal system that adapts to the characteristics of the digital age, strengthen the supervision of platform behavior, and protect users' data rights and political participation rights.

Marxist political economy provides a deep perspective for understanding the inherent contradictions of the platform economy. Research shows that the platform economy has constructed a new type of production relationship through data monopoly, which not only leads to the concentration of economic power but also has a fundamental impact on the distribution of political power. The value production and distribution mechanism in the platform economy has exacerbated social inequality and undermined the foundation of the traditional democratic system.

The combination of law and Marxist political economics provides a new theoretical framework for understanding and solving the failure of political democracy in the platform economy era. This combination not only reveals the multi-dimensional impact of the platform economy on the traditional democratic system but also provides theoretical support for institutional reform and governance innovation. Through this theoretical framework, we can more comprehensively grasp the impact mechanism of the platform economy on political democracy and provide practical guidance for building a fairer and transparent digital economy governance system.

The research conclusions show that solving the problem of political democracy failure in the platform economy era requires multi-level institutional innovation. At the legal system level, sound data protection regulations and anti-monopoly measures should be established, and at the economic system level, attention should be paid to the fair allocation of data elements and the transparency of algorithm governance. At the governance mechanism level, a collaborative governance model involving multiple subjects should be established to ensure the coordination and unity of platform development and democratic values. Only through comprehensive institutional reform can we effectively respond to the challenges of the platform economy to political democracy and maintain social fairness and justice.

Recommendation

Based on the conclusions of this study, the problem of political democracy failure in the platform economy era urgently needs to be alleviated through a series of policy measures. The following suggestions are aimed at strengthening platform management and security, ensuring that the development of the platform economy is coordinated with the basic values of political democracy.





It is recommended to establish a sound platform regulatory framework. The government should formulate special laws and regulations to clarify the responsibilities and obligations of platform companies in the process of data collection, use, and storage, and ensure the security and privacy protection of user data. Anti-monopoly supervision of platforms should be strengthened to prevent excessive concentration of market power and maintain a fair and competitive market environment. By establishing a transparent regulatory mechanism, the public's trust in platform companies will be enhanced, and democratic participation will be promoted.

Promote legislative protection of data rights. Users' ownership of their data should be clarified, and users should be given the right to know and control their data. Legislation should be used to protect the rights and interests of users in the process of data use, ensure that users can choose whether to share personal data independently, and effectively supervise the use of data. This measure will not only help protect user privacy but also enhance users' sense of participation and trust in the platform.

Strengthen the security management of the platform. Platform companies should establish a sound security management system, conduct security audits and risk assessments regularly, and promptly discover and repair security vulnerabilities. The government should encourage platform companies to adopt advanced security technologies, improve data protection capabilities, and prevent data leakage and abuse. At the same time, an emergency response mechanism should be established to ensure that measures can be taken quickly in the event of a security incident to reduce the impact on users and society.

Promote a governance model with multi-party participation. The government, platform companies, users, and social organizations should jointly participate in platform governance to form a pattern of collaborative governance by multiple entities. By establishing a user feedback mechanism, users are encouraged to participate in the decision-making process of the platform to enhance the transparency and sense of responsibility of the platform. The government should play a guiding role, promote effective cooperation among all parties in platform governance, and ensure that the development of the platform economy is in line with the public interest.

Strengthen research and evaluation of the platform economy. The government should set up a special agency to regularly evaluate the development of the platform economy and its impact on political democracy, and adjust policy measures promptly. Through data-driven decision-making, ensure the scientificity and effectiveness of policies, and provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the healthy development of the platform economy.

By establishing a sound platform regulatory framework, promoting legislative protection of data rights, strengthening platform security management, promoting a governance model with multi-party participation, and strengthening research and evaluation of the platform economy, the problem of political and democratic failure in the platform economy era can be effectively alleviated and social fairness and justice can be maintained. These policy recommendations not only help improve the management level and security of the platform but also lay the foundation for building a fairer and transparent digital economy governance system.

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