Statehood 3.0: Temptations and Restraints

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Introduction

States are once again undergoing a major transformation, this time catalysed by digitalisation, the ongoing integration of digital technologies and digitised data across the economy and society (Eurofound, 2024) but also including automation and other aspects. Digital transformation can be characterised as increasingly capable systems, increasingly integrated technology and increasingly quantified society (Susskind, 2020).

There are diverse optimistic and pessimistic accounts on digitalisation and its implications but what can be learned by linking digitalisation and statehood more specifically? What are the key aspects to keep an eye on in the currently unfolding transformation of statehood from a political and governance studies perspective?

In this article, I first discuss the concept and key aspects of the state and elaborate the concept of statehood 3.0 as related to the earlier types. Then I discuss the opportunities opened by digital transformation and develop the idea of temptations and restraints created by it. The temptations and restraints are then more closely studied in two key areas of state operation: transforming sovereignty and neoliberal governance. This builds the basis for a concluding discussion of the key aspects relevant in developing a human-centred statehood 3.0.

Discussing the relationship between digitalisation and statehood, we need to keep in mind that while the technological aspects of digitalisation create the basis for transformation(s) it will nevertheless most likely be shaped by human and contextual factors, at least based on historical experience. Thus, to discuss the transformations in statehood, politics and governance we should contextualise it historically with human and relational aspects in mind.

Transformations in the operation of the state

There are many and diverse ways to understand and define the state (see, for example, Nelson, 2006; Marinetto, 2007; Bevir and Rhodes, 2010; Pierson, 2011; Jessop, 2015; Vesting, 2022). To first develop a broad understanding, I build on two sources that outline the key features of the state. The Montevideo Convention (1933), a major legal source, defines the state as having a permanent population, a defined territory, a government and the capacity to enter into relations with other states.

Offering a more detailed account along these lines, Pierson (2011, p. 6) identifies nine key features of the modern state: (monopoly) control of the means of violence, territoriality, sovereignty, constitutionality (including also the state aims and purposes), impersonal power (also including the rule of law), public bureaucracy, authority/legitimacy, citizenship, and taxation (also including welfare).

Statehood can be defined as the condition of being an independent state or nation (e.g., Collins Dictionary, 2024). In this concept, the focus is on the capacity to operate as a state, a quality that may be more or less advanced and runs in parallel with the more formal aspects. Here, the key issue is how the power centre and the citizenry relate and interact in their territory and towards other states. In this process, the political and governance arrangements, citizenry and territory are constantly (re-)constituted, as are all the features of the state (see, for example, Finer, 1999a; Finer, 1999b; Finer, 1999c; Rae, 2002; Pierson, 2011; Hameiri 2010; Jessop, 2015).

One can have more pessimistic and optimistic, more cynical and hopeful views on the state and statehood. This is a partial answer to the overarching question of whether the state is a monster, as the answer to this will very much depend on the perspective. But whatever the level of optimism or cynicism, the key issue is the evolution of the state as a way to dominate, to generate a certain level of social order and organisation, and manage human communities, not only top-down, but also collaboratively, and to an extent, bottom up.

The idea for the concept of statehood 3.0 came from the development of the Internet. There are three clear-cut generations of Internet as for now: we likely remember the one-sided flow of information in Web 1.0, the original Web; then we experienced Web 2.0, which is mostly related to social media and bottom-up content production. Now, for some time already, we are in the environment of Web 3.0; it continues the previous generation, but also includes algorithm-based steering and control. What you see from Web 3.0 is based on algorithms. There is a huge amount of information, but only some of it reaches you. This is not entirely based on your choice, although it's based on calculations of your preferences. (For some time, the concept of Web 4.0 based on artificial intelligence has also been around, but here I discuss it as part of 3.0.)

How to apply this to statehood? Building on works on the development of the state (e.g. Jellinek, 1914; Schmitt, 1963; Poggi, 1990; Finer, 1999a; Finer, 1999b; Finer, 1999c; Mann, 1986, 1993, 2012, 2013), we can identify two major generations of state organisation so far: the traditional state and the modern state. A modern state is clearly demarcated, well organised, relatively centralised and purposefully governed and came to fruition in the 19th century Western world, having evolved since the 15th century. The traditional state, in this analysis, refers to a wide range of various territorial power arrangements that preceded the modern state and were looser in terms of organisation, but nevertheless had some of it.

We can denote the traditional state statehood as 1.0. Statehood 1.0 was relatively weak in its organisational capacity and in terms of infrastructure and outreach

towards every citizen and every location. Statehood 2.0 is the main reference for modern states, based on the idea of cohesion, in terms of politics, identity, administration, clear borders, and so on.

Building on this, we could characterise statehood 3.0 as the information and technology-rich state of contemporary times and the (near) future, which is based on the organisation of the modern state but in many ways functions differently from that. I'm mostly referring to the new developments of recent decades, especially, but not only, those of information and communication technology, automation, development of all kinds of new devices, artificial intelligence and other related aspects. With a view to the main elements of the state (e.g., Jessop, 2015) a selection of the main differences between statehood 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 is presented in the following table.

Table 1.
***Statehood 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0*.**

Characteristic	**Statehood 1.0**	**Statehood 2.0**	**Statehood 3.0**
Territory	Internally diverse within the frontiers	Relatively homogenous within clearly demarcated borders	Area within and beyond national borders that is governable with technological support
Population	Subjects to the ruler	Citizens of a nation state	Citizens who are empowered, steered and controlled
Organising power	Ruler and his court	State apparatus	Digitally amplified ensemble of state institutions
State idea	Glory of ruler (and often god(s))	National state project	Some hegemonic but contested state project

Source: author

For this article, the key difference between statehood 2.0 and statehood 3.0 is how cohesion, organisation and control are reached. In the modern state, it is based on human control of and over the political leaders, citizens, political party leaders, policemen, military, teachers—whoever. Technology is used, of course, but those who control and who are controlled are human beings. In statehood 3.0, it is much more manifold, diverse and impersonal as technology has a significant role, both as the instrument and object of cohesion, organisation and control—and maybe even more.

Originally, there was much discussion, especially in optimistic globalisation literature, of the state somehow fading away and dissolving into a social fabric, being replaced by markets, networks, global flows and movements and so on (see, for example, Ohmae, 1991; Kuper, 2004). A soberer view, focusing on the transformation of the state instead of its dissolution, regained prevalence relatively quickly (e.g., Sørensen, 2004).

But what I argue here is that in recent decades rather a contrary process has taken place. Instead of the state weakening, it has been strengthened by the new technologies. While 30 years ago the Internet was heralded as an extra-state space beyond control, it is now developing into a controllable environment and, moreover, a vehicle for control The new technologies enable a new level of cohesion, control and organisation, and in a much more impersonal way. There are possibilities and limits in this—temptations and restraints—and this is what we discuss next.

Opportunities, temptations and restraints in statehood 3.0

Digitalisation has opened up new opportunities for the state in the development of information- and communication-based technologies, automation, and development of artificial intelligence. This is something that is ongoing, but we can sketch out some main features.

We need to analytically separate the different aspects of this technological change. The aspect we are more familiar with is probably all kinds of communication systems—internet, Zoom, whatever—that enable us to have more information, discussions etc. But information and communication technologies also have different uses.

From another point of view, digitalisation has resulted in various monitoring solutions. It can also lead to huge databases containing information about human beings that can be accessed only by a few people, probably officials, and utilised for a purpose. Here, analytics and access are of key importance.

In the past decade or so, we have also seen the development of autonomous devices. This can be better seen from the illustrations here. We already have drones that fly and can deliver post or kill someone. We have autonomous weapons, weapon systems and so on.

The effects of both monitoring and autonomous devices are amplified by artificial intelligence: this is the machine's ability to perform some cognitive functions we usually associate with human minds, such as perceiving, reasoning, learning, interacting with the environment, problem-solving, and even exercising creativity (McKinsey & Company, 2024). We can speak of intelligent systems developing a course of action, implementing it via digital solutions and adjusting it based on monitoring the environment and learning from this.

As we see, the contemporary technological revolution has many aspects, but, at least nowadays, it must eventually come down to human beings whose capacities for organising and control are greatly enhanced. While both the companies and state bodies can use these opportunities, we can easily conclude that states as central authorities seem to win more from having the capacity-enhancing devices, databases, resources, and so on (see, for example, Bigo et al., 2019; Susskind, 2020).

The winners include both the small states, who can function as normal states, and the very large states, who can expand their power and influence across borders much more easily. But it is easy to see that the larger states win disproportionately, and in any case the opportunities of organisation and control for the central public authorities expand more than for the rest of society, especially the regular citizens.

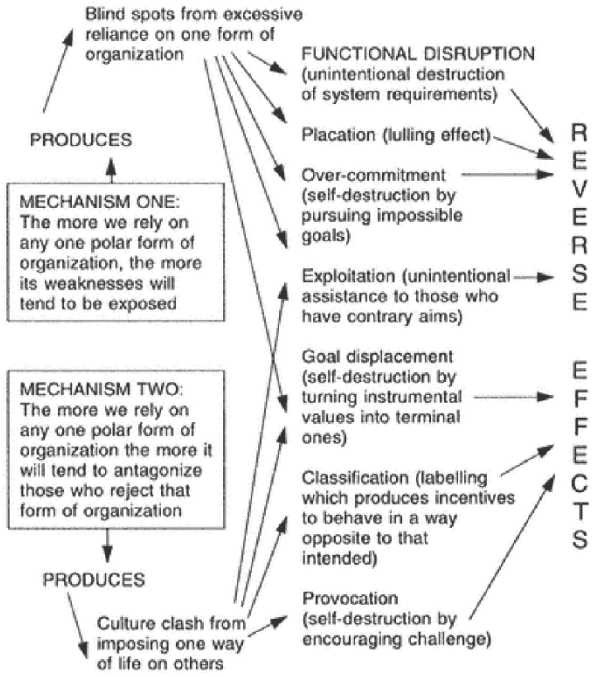
But maybe human beings can also win out. Ordinary citizens will also have more information and tools, more comfortable homes, equipment and so on. It's not only a one-way development, so the future power relations are, to an extent, open. But we cannot forget that in comparison to devices human beings tend to be more emotional and can often be manipulated, thus a good awareness, education and restraint are needed to be sufficiently autonomous in this new situation. And the trend, at least for now, is towards greater central organisation and control possibilities.

What are the digitalisation-related temptations and restraints in statehood 3.0? With regard to temptations my thinking is based on the idea that if one has new capacities at his or her disposal, one will be interested in making use of these new capacities and will test their limits. We have a tendency towards technological optimism, and much can be done with the new capabilities opened up by digitalisation. Consequently, there is a temptation to try, use and, possibly over-use these new opportunities.

My understanding of restraints and their mechanisms is much based on Christopher Hood (1998), who has demonstrated that all the ways of governing, emphasising different aspects of human nature and different ways to steer human beings, can be over-exploited. All of them are partly perfect and partly internally flawed; that is why if you adopt just one political and governing strategy you will eventually run into difficulties, as has been seen various times in history.

Hood himself developed this perception in the context of public management. Over-reliance on one strategy leads you to its overuse, with reverse effects and resulting problems: with the hierarchical strategy, over-reliance on dominance leads to failures in too loftily launched grand projects; the egalitarian could result in endless discussions; the individualist strategy is prone to cynical overuse; and the fatalist one to endless passivity. The general logic is presented in the following figure.

Figure 1.
Reverse effects of overuse of governance strategies.



Source: Hood (1998, p. 218).

We can also use a similar perspective for broader political and governance processes and again seek restraints for digitalisation-based temptations. I see such restraints emerging in two ways. One way is related to automatic restraints. If you focus only on one strategy, there will come a point when you will not get forward anymore in most situations: you need to develop a new perspective and adjust the strategy. This is what I see as an automatic restraint; something that is, in a way, built into the system.

The other restraints do not emerge automatically but need to be set up, and this requires much more work and elaboration, and—which is probably the harder part—much willpower. Here, I will mostly discuss the automatic restraints of new technology-rich states. But of course, I will also give some thoughts about those restraints that likely do not emerge automatically and need to be consciously developed.

To study the temptations and restraints in greater depth, I now focus on two areas where issues arise in state operation. The first area is the transformation of sovereignty related to digitalisation, with a focus on the new forms of dominance and inequality in the international arena, although there are consequences as well. The second area is more domestic: it is the relationship of neoliberal governance to democracy and citizenship—but of course, this also has some international implications.

Temptations and restraints in transforming sovereignty

Sovereignty is a manifold concept (see, among others, Laski, 1921; Bartelson, 1995, 2011; Krasner, 1999, 2009, 2012; MacCormick, 1999; Kalmo & Skinner, 2010; Cohen, 2012; Inocencio, 2014). Concisely put, it can be understood as the supreme authority in the polity (e.g., Bartelson, 2011), be it legally or politically based (e.g., MacCormick, 1999), exclusive or meta-governance style (Bodinian

vs. Althusian tradition, e.g., Inocencio, 2014; Bell & Hindmoor, 2009), etc. Krasner (2012, p. 6) outlines seven classical elements of sovereignty: territory, population, effective domestic hierarchy of control, *de jure* constitutional independence, *de facto* absence of external authority, international recognition, and the ability to regulate trans-border flows.

The conventional concept of sovereignty that superseded the earlier prince-based understanding developed up to the 19th century through the four sequential steps of territorialisation, depersonalisation, absolutisation and popularisation (Bartelson 1995, 2011). Nowadays we can speak of a new game of sovereignty that is based on much more interaction among the states and regulated intervention. The legal core of sovereignty is intact, but the operational mechanisms have started to change, both internationally and in the domestic arena (Sorensen, 2004).

The distinction of three aspects of sovereignty – internal, external and popular – is well known. Internal sovereignty denotes the ability of state authorities to control the territory and the people. External sovereignty signifies the international recognition of independence and the government's ability to freely operate in the international arena (see, for example, Inocencio, 2014). Popular sovereignty has a different reference ground: the ability of people (citizens) to define collective priorities and make decisions, which is the basis of democratic statehood (see, for example, Bourke and Skinner, 2016). In more ambitious approaches, popular sovereignty can be seen as a precondition for the external (recognition) and even internal (legitimacy) sovereignty. These aspects are presented in the following table.

Table 2.
Aspects of sovereignty.

Aspect of sovereignty	**General characterisation**
Internal	The ability of state authorities to control the territory and the people. Systematic organisation of public authority, finance and force, clearly defined population, territorial integrity.
External	International recognition of independence and the government's ability to freely operate in the international arena, diplomatic contacts with other states, membership in international organisations.
Popular	The ability of people (citizens) to define collective priorities and make (and change) binding decisions. Constitution founded on the rule of the people, decision-making according to a set of rules, reasonable expectation that fellow citizens comply with decisions and share outcomes, regular possibility to change decision-makers.

Source: Kalev, Jakobson 2022.

These aspects have developed historically at different speeds and in different ways, and are thus only compatible to a limited extent, even if they are relatively reconciled in a modernist setting. In the contemporary international system, we see new dynamics partly due precisely to the new opportunities for state

governments. Using their new opportunities, the state governments can expand their outreach and influence transnationally. This leads to an increase of internal-type sovereignty at the relative expense of the external type (Kalev & Jakobson, 2022).

Bartelson (2011) discusses this as the governmentalisation of sovereignty, as it will become more homogeneously constructed, assessed, and also performed across the globe. Hameiri (2010) outlines how such a governmentalised sovereignty runs into another set of difficulties because of human agency. For example, studying state-building interventions in the world, he demonstrates that even if you go in with a clear-cut plan, you will become embedded in local contexts. These will also shape those who intervene, not only those who are inside.

The development towards more internal-type sovereignty opportunities also leads to more hegemonic ambitions and related strategies, a fuzzier process of international politics, and increased asymmetry of power among the states and in the international system. It also fosters the resurgence of realism in the international arena, although this need not be limited to that development.

Thus, we can conclude that the new technological opportunities create temptations for attempting more power and dominance of the (larger) state governments, but at least as long as these are steered by humans the results will likely not be uniform and the international power balance is still constantly evolving, albeit more or less along realist or some other lines. Such a dynamic can be seen as an automatic restraint, at least to the point that we have more than one capable state in the international arena.

Another aspect of this process is more domestically oriented and creates a bridge to studying neoliberal technocratic governance. Capable and interested states operating across borders, of course, utilise the new resources available. Just to give a couple examples, they utilise cyberattacks against strategic targets; one might remember the problems of Iranian nuclear power due to cyberattacks, or how general Qasim Solaimani was killed by a remotely operated drone.

This creates new insecurity and a resulting process of securitisation (Buzan et al., 1998; Nyers, 2009; Omand, 2010; Guillaume & Huysmans, 2013). This is the idea, I would say, of hyper politicising some aspects of life. When you politicise, you have several viewpoints and you have arguments in between different viewpoints. When you hyper-politicise, you try to depict something as so huge a threat that there is just one answer, no others, and you are able to deliver. So, over-securitisation is something that can be built up as a feeling, and this is largely based on media – social media, mass media, whatever. This builds a justification for more top-down strategies that claim to be on good intentions.

We have had new EU databases on people justified by Schengen free movement. We have seen other databases, several other measures and a new layer of documentation of people based on COVID prevention. But these nice, securitising initiatives also build up a new layer of top-down governance in the Western states. It is largely anonymous. Most people just have glimpses of it, and it is quite

extensive, relatively precise, and could be backed up by quite small forces; when you know where to go, you don't need police everywhere, just as one example. We see state capacities extending to new domains, and this concerns both international and domestic arenas.

Temptations and restraints in digitalising neoliberal governance

In recent decades we can speak of a process of technocratisation and the divergence of vote-seeking frontstage politics and backstage policy-making in the Western world, especially Europe (e.g., Papadopoulos, 2013). It is often characterised as the new public management doctrine (e.g., Christensen & Laegreid, 2002; Pollitt & Bouckert, 2017; Sootla & Kalev, 2020) or neoliberalism (Crouch, 2011; Davies, 2014). For us, both are relevant, as the doctrine highlights the strategies and tools, and neoliberalism the justifications for a new style of governing.

Although new public management has evolved through many generations (e.g., Hay, 2007) and is quite diverse in practice, its managerial-technocratic focus is well handled by its main tools, which are presented in the following table. More broadly, its core purpose is to manage inputs and outputs in a way that ensures economy and responsiveness to consumers through managers operating based on performance targets, borrowing many methods and tools from private sector management. Thus, efficiency is achieved by considerable top-down, if sometimes interactive, technocratisation.

Table 3.

The new public management toolkit.

Market-inspired reforms	**Governance reforms**
• *Privatisation* of state assets and certain services • *Internal markets* – separating purchasers from providers within the public sector to create new markets, e.g. care for elderly • *Performance budgeting* – results-oriented, target-driven budgeting • *Performance contracts* and *pay-for-performance* – establishing performance targets for departments and individualised pay scales for public employees • *Programme review* – systematic analysis of costs and benefits of individual programmes • *Compulsory competitive tendering* – services delivered by the private or voluntary sector • *One-stop-shops* – coordination of programmes through one delivery system to eliminate duplication	• *Decentralisation* – moving responsibility for programme delivery and delegating budgetary authority from central government to provincial or local governments or neighbourhoods • *Open government* – freedom of information, e-government and public engagement mechanisms – e.g. citizens' juries and other deliberative forums • *Standards in public life* – constituting effective public administration frameworks (e.g. executive machinery, departments, planning and coordination mechanisms) • Development of *codes of ethical practice* (e.g., codes of conduct, transparency, accountability, effective audit, monitoring and evaluation) • *Collaborative government* with *stakeholders* • *Co-production* with citizens

• *Invest to save budgets* – venture capital for oiling the wheels of government • *Quality standards* – applying principles of quality management, e.g., Citizens' Charters, 'Best Value' or 'Comprehensive Performance Assessments', public service agreements	
Deregulatory/regulatory reform • *Personnel deregulation* – open competition in recruitment, performance-related pay and elimination of civil service controls over hiring, firing, promotion, etc. • *Purchasing deregulation* – permits individual organisations to make decisions about procurement, rather than using centralised purchasing organisations • Creation of *new regulatory bodies* to supervise privatisation and collaborative governance	**Competence reforms – increasing the capacity of public servants to act** • *Staff audits* to determine what personnel is on hand • *Getting the right people into the administration*, partly by stronger incentives to attract and retain them, partly by changing objectives and procedures in an effort to make the work situation more challenging and rewarding, and • *Establishing integrated training programmes* through the establishment of a civil service college/schools of government and professional skills for government/occupational skills/professional accreditation • Coaching and mentoring • Capability review

Source: Evans and Stoker (2022, pp. 148-149)

The reason I discuss neoliberal governance is not only based on its prevalence. The key issue is that it has liberty as its core claim. The manifold techniques of neoliberal governing are, to a large extent, based on the idea of liberating people—at least in a way (see, for example, Davies, 2014). The idea is to make individuals freer, more capable of acting in certain ways, and the governance tools should support this. In addition to the toolbox, there are also several other techniques, such as monitoring, securitisation, communication, and so on. The main focus is similar, nudging people towards some desired ways of behaviour and away from the undesired.

The problem in contemporary neoliberal governance is that there is a relatively narrow understanding of freedom and its enhancement. If people are not egoistic and individualistic in their private and public activities, they are seen as deviating and in need of some indoctrination and stronger measures: this element of a clear-cut truth is actually alien to most of the liberal tradition. Another problem is that there have already been for some time very divergent views and recipes within neoliberalism (e.g. Crouch, 2011; Davies 2014). But the managerial public administrators can nevertheless use their toolkit to steer people to act along the lines of whatever neoliberal rationality currently prevails.

The traditional ideas on which representative government, liberal democracy and citizen agency were founded are currently considerably eroded in contemporary neoliberal governance, and mostly in the guise of doing good. We have different emancipatory activities, surveillance, documentation, post-democratic trends and so on that erode the separation of public and private sphere, immunity, citizens' basic status, functioning representative government, and so on. We need new kinds of restraints here, for example, for immunity or privacy in the contemporary age of exposure.

It is easy to see how digitalisation amplifies the possibilities of neoliberal governance, as its mainly unit-based approach to accounting and management is easily reconcilable with digital logic, and digitalisation vastly increases the amount of data and capacity for calculation. This could easily lead to over-exploitation of logic, seeking ever more ambitious strategies to steer society. Digitalisation strengthens the temptation towards more managerialism and (semi-)authoritarianism.

This (semi-)authoritarianism is not something that is a clear-cut dictatorship. It is more about managing people in rational ways and carrying them along into co-governance initiatives. In this logic, we have people participating in governing activities, but not as democratic decision-makers. The compounding of such governance and digitalisation could create very dangerous combinations in terms of democracy.

So far, there has also been an automatic restraint on the temptation of comprehensive technocratic steering, even if it sometimes emerges slowly. The experience so far has always been that the ambitious systems of data-based steering (e.g., PPBS) and planned economy (e.g., the Soviet system) have failed over time due to unintended side-effects (see also Sootla & Kalev, 2020). Even the less ambitious particular solutions of neoliberal governance run into difficulties and paradoxes, as in many real-life situations efficiency is turned upside down, etc. (e.g., Hibou, 2015).

This restraint is based on human nature. When you seek to steer people towards a very specific way of life, they become very talented at finding sideways directions to undermine both the operation and legitimacy of the system, as exemplified under several ideology-based authoritarian regimes. And of course for any more seriously liberal perspective you become uneasy as the requirements grow and become too heavy for people. Instead of liberating them, they could act as some kind of excessive steering mechanism, resulting in neurosis and its therapeutic governance. This is very much against the ideas in early neoliberalism of empowering people to achieve more.

This may change with the rise of artificial intelligence and further automation. If you have more capable, autonomous and agile systems of steering and control, ambitious top-down governance could be more sustainable. In this case, we need something different from the existing balances. There is some chance that new-

style automatic restraints will emerge, but it is more likely here that new restraints need to be purposefully created.

Conclusion: a human-centred statehood 3.0

We have now seen that while digitalisation clearly leads to transformations in statehood, these can unfold in many ways and forms, and there is a considerable, continuous human role in the outcomes that will emerge. We already see how the modern international system somehow reemerges in a new shape. Most likely, we will also see some resurgence of representative government in the Western states, but we need to transform the old balances into the new, technology-rich context.

We have discussed the temptations towards more top down, technocratic and even autocratic governance based on new digital capacities. But we have also seen the restraints on these temptations, some of which likely emerge automatically while others need to be set up. In order to support human-centred and democratic development of statehood 3.0 we need to pay attention that the system functions as it should. For this, we can find many insights from the studies of statehood, citizenship, democracy, politics, policy and governance.

A crucial aspect to bear in mind is that adapting and steering digitalisation needs to be done with a human-centred view. The political needs to be defined around human beings, as it has so far always been. All the three aspects of the political – politics as contestation over power and aims, policy as the concrete governance strategy and polity as its environment – are based on the idea that human-induced change in the environment is possible. In this way, the political is also the centrepiece of innovation, including political renewal. At the heart of it are different approaches, rationalities, human debates and choices based on them.

The political starts when there are a number of relatively sensible options, opportunities for progress that can be discussed and debated and then put into practice. It is built on human (im)perfection and creativity and thus there is no one truth, nor a single rationality. This differs from the natural inevitability of the unconscious or dogmatic reliance on one incontestable truth (hegemonic, monopoly-seeking religion or ideology). When a dogma or inevitability is contested, the political unfolds. Thus, politics, policy and polity are a profoundly human phenomenon: unlike technocratic phenomena, political debates and choices cannot be instrumentalised and automated.

We need to observe and ensure the representative democratic system functions as it is expected, or if we want to change the system or some of its elements, we do it thoughtfully and address the side-effects if necessary. A democratic state is expected to operate based on the following general logic: people articulate their views, the more active ones coalesce to promote these views, run for elections, and, if successful, make decisions and shape policies. In this process, experts and parliamentary support structures also play a role. The government then implements policies with the help of various governance strategies, institutions and tools. Key institutions balance and control each other to prevent power from concentrating in one place and becoming absolute. The functioning of a democratic

state also needs a shared vision of a common future that can be collaboratively improved.

There are several studies highlighting challenges to the contemporary democratic system (e.g., Papadopoulos, 2013; Blüdhorn, 2013) but several lines of improvement have also been suggested (e.g., Kalev, 2017; Evans & Stoker, 2022). We need to re-strengthen the existing democratic political and governance institutions, facilitate education in democratic citizenship and develop a broader civility. A selection of such measures needs to be implemented, with specific attention to the effects of digitalisation (e.g. Susskind, 2020), designing and developing balancing mechanisms and, more broadly, the underlying principles of digital solutions in the advancement of organisational models and social technologies.

To return to the overarching question, we cannot say that the state is a cold monster nowadays. Despite ongoing digitalisation, it is still largely human-based and, consequently, uncold to a considerable extent. For human-centred development, we need to keep it this way. We need to overcome the temptations of digitalisation for politics and governance by further developing the restraints, building on the experiences of the previous periods. This will be a hard task but, in all likelihood, a doable one.

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