

# Digital Sovereignty - Rhetoric and Reality

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## I. Introduction

Digitalisation has become a “make-or-break issue” (von der Leyen 2021) for Europe. Not only does it require EU policymakers to walk a tightrope between market-making and market-correcting, between fostering digital markets and regulating them (Newman 2020). The increasing emphasis on geo-economic and geo-political dimensions of digital policymaking has further aggravated this challenge as states increasingly seek to protect and promote their model of digital governance (Haggart, Tusikov, and Scholte 2021). Thus, a quarter of a century after John Perry Barlow told the governments of the world that they have “no sovereignty” (Barlow 1996) in cyberspace, those very governments attempt to reassert their “digital sovereignty” (Chander and Sun 2021).

For long, the promotion of sovereignty seemed to be at odds with widely acknowledged core principles of a global, “‘free’ internet” (Mansell 2011, 27), with authoritarian governments using the term as a Trojan Horse for restricting freedom of expression and opinion rights online (Flonk, Jachtenfuchs, and Obendiek 2020; Mueller 2020). Moreover, in the wake of growing concerns about issues such as disinformation (Howard 2020), surveillance (Zuboff 2019), and excessive market power (Khan 2016), democracies have begun to endorse digital sovereignty - especially in Europe. In 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron advocated for a ‘sovereign Europe’ which would “lead rather than undergo” the digital transformation “by promoting its model within globalization, a model combining innovation and regulation” (Macron 2017). In 2019, German Chancellor Angela Merkel likewise embraced the term digital sovereignty, emphasizing, however, that sovereignty in the digital space should not be associated with closing oneself off. Instead, it should mean advocating “a joint, free, open and secure global internet” (Merkel 2019).

Between the laissez-faire approach established by the US and the strictly state-controlled model implemented in China, the EU has increasingly tried to find a distinctly “European approach” (Radu and Chenou 2015) to internet regulation. Digital sovereignty, it seems, has emerged as a guiding principle for this “new path” (Macron 2018): Commission president Ursula von der Leyen has made it the centrepiece of her Commission’s digital agenda, describing it as the “capability that Europe must have to make its own choices, based on its own values, respecting its own rules” (von der Leyen 2020). For Commissioner Thierry Breton, digital sovereignty is

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about “Europe defending its strategic interests. Being assertive of our values. Firm in our ambitions. Confident of our means” (Breton 2020). Employed by high-level officials, think tanks (Hobbs 2020), and leading scholars (Floridi 2020), the term has become a buzzword among EU policymakers (Obendiek 2021). But what is behind that buzz? Is the discourse on digital sovereignty just empty rhetoric, or is it accompanied by actual policy change?

The academic literature has increasingly considered the empirical phenomenon (Couture and Toupin 2019; Pohle and Thiel 2020; Schmitz and Seidl 2021) and normative desirability of digital sovereignty (Mueller 2020; Roberts et al. 2021). While some argue that digital sovereignty may have the potential to assert European values (Roberts et al. 2021) or regulations even globally (Christakis 2020), others suggest it should be considered merely as a “discursive practice” (Pohle and Thiel 2020). Other scholars, meanwhile, explicitly warn against the fragmentation of the internet into a splinternet (Lemley 2020), or the potential empowerment of authoritarian actors (Mueller 2020) as a corollary of demands for digital sovereignty.

Surprisingly little research, however, has explicitly addressed the *question if and to what extent discourse on digital sovereignty is accompanied by actual policy change*. Against this backdrop, the aim of our project is to explore three interrelated sets of questions:

- A) Which changes in *discourse* towards digital sovereignty can be observed? Which actors claim (or negate) control gaps and demand (or reject) various strategies towards achieving digital sovereignty, based on which reasons? Do actors acknowledge or dispute the relevance and applicability of digital sovereignty as a concept?
- B) Which changes in *EU policy* towards digital sovereignty can be observed? In other words, have directions, instruments and/or settings of policies lately been altered, or have changes to that effect at least been proposed in official EU draft policies?
- C) What is the *relationship* between discursive and policy change? What comes first? Do we sometimes have both, sometimes neither, and/or sometimes one without the other? If so, why?

In addressing these questions, individual papers should ideally make two contributions. First, provide a systematic analysis of the extent to which the rhetoric on digital sovereignty translates into policy change in one or several areas of EU policymaking. Second, they should illuminate the – potentially complicated – relation between discursive and policy change and discuss why we might observe different combinations of those (see Table 5 below).

To ascertain if and to what extent the discourse on digital sovereignty has been accompanied by policy innovation, the paper first outlines our definition of digital sovereignty. Second, to assess the significance of digital sovereignty in digital policymaking overall, we need to assess the degree and kind of discourse and policy change towards increasing control of the digital. Therefore, we develop and present our conceptualisation for both discursive and policy change by drawing on the work of Vivien Schmidt (2002) and Peter Hall (1993), respectively. In a third step, we present a categorisation of potential results and encourage our authors to discuss how discourse and policy change are related and why, or why not, one is accompanied by the other.

## II. Defining Digital Sovereignty

Digital sovereignty is an inherently ambiguous concept that different actors use in different ways (Couture and Toupin 2019; Mueller 2020; Pohle and Thiel 2020; Roberts et al. 2021; Schmitz and Seidl 2021). However, frequent usages of digital sovereignty share some core dimensions. Our definition, therefore, needs to be broad enough to capture somewhat diverse uses of the term but narrow enough to make clear what it is not, for the purpose of our study at least. Digital sovereignty, we argue, has a core meaning around which various actors layer different interpretations and directions. This core of digital sovereignty stipulates the need for *control of the digital* on the physical layer (infrastructure, devices), the code layer (standards, rules, design), and the data layer (ownership, flows, use) (Chander and Sun 2021; Floridi 2020). Control implies the ability to influence the design and use of digital technologies and data. In contrast to interpretations that link digital sovereignty to democratic legitimacy (Roberts et al. 2021), this definition remains agnostic as to the legitimacy of control. The emphasis on control is compatible with the notion of digital sovereignty as promoted by actors such as China and Russia as well as EU policymakers' understanding of the term. It also, crucially, does not restrict the sovereignty claims to states but, in principle, allows different entities – and even individuals – to claim and exercise sovereignty. Our focus is, however, on public actors, particularly EU institutions and member states. Since the relevance of actors varies between policies and issues according to, inter alia, decision-making patterns and veto powers, we leave the interpretation and, importantly, explication of “their” relevant set of actors to our authors.

Beyond the core meaning of control, actors link digital sovereignty to diverse measures, guiding principles, and the empowerment or constraint of different actors. States or supranational organisations can achieve control of the digital through capacity-building, investment, or regulation. Capacity-building efforts have, for example, contributed to strategic cooperation in cyber defence to strengthen resilience against cyberattacks (European Parliament 2021). In the context of investment, the insistence on digital sovereignty has accompanied funding of semiconductor factories to reduce strategic dependencies (Breton 2021). In the context of regulation, pushing for Europe's digital sovereignty has been linked to fighting disinformation (Rone 2021, 173). These measures are not mutually exclusive and often appear together, for instance in the promotion of European cybersecurity standards alongside significant investments to establish capacities in key cybersecurity infrastructures (European Commission 2020a).

Actors may also have different goals and guiding principles. They may be motivated by a desire to protect or promote the interests or values of individuals, for example through the stricter enforcement of data protection standards (Madiaga 2020, 4). They may also aim to protect or increase the competitiveness of European companies, for example in countering the dominance of foreign firms in cloud storage (European Commission 2020b). Finally, they may aim to protect their values, such as the European “core democratic values” (Germany's Presidency of the Council of the EU 2020), or their strategic public interests, such as in the restriction of third country involvement in critical infrastructure provision (Kaska, Beckvard, and Minárik 2019).

Importantly, actors also seem to emphasise different versions of “digital sovereignty”. One is stressing the benefits of globalisation but striving to improve the EU's strategies of coping with

it or even strategically steering it. Our label for this route is “managed interdependence”. Others seem to aim, to varying degrees, in the direction of what would in earlier times have been called autarchy, i.e. of being more self-sufficient within one’s own borders. We call that direction “increased autonomy”, with varying ambitions to close borders (Schimmelfennig 2021a). In short, some actors may prefer to manage mutual interdependence more strategically, while others may more strongly emphasise the need to increase autonomy.

Crucially, despite different motivations, measures and interpretations, the logic of control differs from other logics, specifically the efficiency logic of market discourse or the rights-centred legitimacy logic of human rights discourse. To what extent the three (and perhaps other) logics of (i) control, (ii) economic efficiency, and (iii) rights-based legitimacy challenge, replace, and co-exist with each other in specific policy areas, we consider an interesting empirical question.

### **III. Conceptualising discursive change**

On a discursive level, references to digital sovereignty seem to constitute a significant departure from the narrative of the “‘free’ internet” (Mansell 2011, 27). This idea has dominated much of the last decades and in many ways intensified the normative problematisation of government intervention in the digital space. We are therefore interested in the establishment of digital sovereignty as a new *central positive reference point* in the policy discourse. We consider the discursive change to be significant if it establishes digital sovereignty as a central idea that is perceived to enable policy-makers to develop solutions to policy problems (Schmidt 2002, 219f.). “Central” applies when digital sovereignty is a core idea, discussed by relevant policy actors when developing solutions to policy problems. It does not hold when digital sovereignty is, at best, one reference point amongst many others of similar or greater significance. “Positive” applies when relevance and applicability (as defined below) tend to be attributed, at least by most relevant actors. By contrast, there may be a debate taking place but with contestations focusing mostly on the relevance and/or on the applicability of digital sovereignty for solving policy problems.

As discourse, we understand not only “the representation or embodiment of ideas but also [...] the interactive processes by and through which ideas are generated and communicated” (Schmidt 2011, 107). Naturally, discursive change as well as its effects are dependent on context, such as institutional settings (Schmidt 2011, 119–22) as well as the authority of the speaker (Parsons 2016). Of central relevance are also the agents that draw on existing and emerging ideas in different ways (Carstensen 2011) and their embedding in, for example, epistemic communities (Haas 1992) or advocacy coalitions (Sabatier 1988; Sikkink 2002).

However, in addition to these more structural and normative constraints, tangible policy change is more likely when a policy discourse adheres to specific discursive standards. Schmidt derives three such standards, which serve as her indicators of the significance of a concept on a discursive level (Schmidt 2002, 219). If the discourse fails to specifically outline the relevance, applicability, and coherence of – in our case – digital sovereignty, Schmidt would expect that it is less likely to provide concrete and acceptable prescriptions for policy design.

In our context, this implies the following. First, the relevance of the discourse needs to identify problems and challenges that are expected to be solved by digital sovereignty. Second, digital sovereignty should be applicable to the solution of these challenges, i.e. actors need to specify *how* digital sovereignty may solve the identified problems. Third, to suffice Schmidt’s criteria, the policy discourse of digital sovereignty would need to be presented as more or less coherent in terms of potential instruments, norms, and concepts. However, we consider that digital sovereignty might be presented successfully as an ideational concept even if inconsistencies and contradictions occur. For example, actors could link digital sovereignty to different versions of the concept emphasizing the importance of “managed interdependence” or “increased autonomy” respectively. We, therefore, only focus on Schmidt’s first two dimensions, namely the potential relevance and applicability of digital sovereignty. Accordingly, if important actors acknowledge the *relevance* and *applicability* of digital sovereignty, this qualifies as a discursive change towards digital sovereignty. This excludes changes where digital sovereignty is considered relevant but not applicable, or the opposite. The combination of digital sovereignty being, first, a central *and*, second, a positive reference point with both relevance and applicability, amounts to “significant” discursive change (see Table 5).

It is important to note that we *exclusively focus on explicit references to digital or tech sovereignty* (or closely related sub-concepts such as cloud sovereignty or data sovereignty). If actors use alternative terms, such as “(open) strategic autonomy”, we would like to find out why.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, our focus is on elites, such as high-ranking officials and institutions and major players in the field rather than whether the term has been picked up widely outside of policy circles. In sum, when central actors convincingly argue for the relevance and applicability of digital or technological sovereignty, and when the latter concept is a core idea discussed by relevant policy actors when developing solutions to policy problems, we consider this as significant discursive change towards digital sovereignty.

#### **IV. Conceptualizing policy change**

On a policy level, the emphasis on control of the digital similarly seems to diverge from previous policy goals, as significant parts of the digital space used to rely on limited capacity and decentred regulation through multistakeholderism and technical expertise (ten Oever 2021). To conceptualise policy change and assess its significance, we rely on the conceptual heuristic provided by Hall (1993). Hall’s framework distinguishes between three orders of change. This enables the analysis of diverse policy areas, including trade, cybersecurity, or data governance. The framework allows to categorise varying forms of change and therefore to assess cross-sectional variation, as we explicate with examples from our area of study in Table 1.

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<sup>2</sup> Actors might avoid the term strategically or for other reasons. For example, in economic policymaking, Schmidt has illustrated how the neoliberal discourse of the government under British Prime Minister Tony Blair strategically provided an opportunity to implement redistributive welfare policy measures by stealth (Schmidt 2002, chap. 6). In contrast, less strategically, the concept of “strategic autonomy” has been prominent in security and defence policy (Fiott 2018).

**Table 1: Qualitative categories of policy change**

Category of adjustment	Object of change	Description of change	Examples	Relevant data
<b>Change in degrees of steering</b> (1 <sup>st</sup> order)	Existing instrument's finetuning	The settings of policy instruments are changed	Numerical calibration (e.g. level of fines), redefinition of categories in an instrument, typically a fine-grained innovation	Specifications in official, legislative or executive, policy documents
<b>Change in the form of steering</b> (2 <sup>nd</sup> order)	Instrument-level innovation, concerns the tools of governance and basic elements in a policy	introduction of new instruments or techniques	New funds, new or revised Regulation or Directive that contains one or more instruments	Basic elements of policy as specified in the relevant official documents
<b>Change in the direction of steering</b> (3 <sup>rd</sup> order)	Basic orientation of a policy as expressed in its goal(s)	Specification of new goals or an alternative hierarchy of priorities (for there are typically conflicting goals present)	Concern for sovereignty as control included as a goal in specific EU policies (e.g. "limit dependency on one major provider")	Adopted documents and their related administrative guidelines, including notably also recitals and explanatory statements

First-order change refers to the *degree* of steering through altering the settings of existing policy instruments. For example, compared to the 1995 Data Protection Directive, the GDPR has significantly increased the level of fines. Typically, further experiences in implementation or new knowledge trigger such adjustments that refine the existing instruments in reference to persisting goals (Hall 1993, 278). In contrast, second-order change refers to alterations in the *form* of steering through the introduction of new instruments. Dissatisfaction with past experiences may contribute to the rise of alternative instruments to achieve current policy goals. For example, the proposed Digital Services Act (DSA) replaces voluntary with mandatory measures to achieve the existing goal of restricting illegal content online. Finally, third-order change refers to changes in the *direction* of steering through changes in the policy goals or the prioritisation of existing goals.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> One problem of the conceptual assumptions of Hall's framework is that it associates third order change with a Kuhnian 'paradigm shift' (1970). However, the concept of paradigm remains underspecified in the original article and underestimates the iterative character of incremental change (Hay 2001). We therefore distinguish the notion

It is important to note that we propose using Hall’s heuristic pragmatically to categorise different types of change but do not adopt the broader conceptual assumptions of Hall’s framework. For example, Hall seems to assume that a higher level of change automatically also implies change on the lower levels, but we consider this an empirical question. It should be noted, moreover, that a higher “order” of change does not necessarily always indicate more significant change. First-order change can at times be more radical than second order change. Consider ramping up existing fines to an extreme extent versus introducing a new policy instrument that is “without teeth”.

Applying Hall’s categories to our study of EU digital policy change, we assume that policy change towards digital sovereignty occurs if the degree, form, or direction of steering has been altered in policies to increase control over the digital. For a *significant* change on the policy level, however, innovation would in at least one of these dimensions need to depart from the status quo ante in a manner that is substantial in the relevant context, either quantitatively or qualitatively. For details on this conceptualisation, see Table 2.

**Table 2. Overview of main analytical categories**

<i>Concept</i>	<i>Crucial notions</i>	<i>Operationalisation</i>
digital sovereignty as a <i>central positive reference point</i> in the discourse		
	central	digital sovereignty is the core idea, or one among only few, discussed by relevant policy actors when developing solutions to policy problems
	positive	relevance and applicability tend to be attributed, at least by most relevant actors
	relevance	identifying problems and challenges that are expected to be solved by digital sovereignty
	applicability	digital sovereignty should be applicable to the solution of these challenges, i.e. actors need to specify <i>how</i> digital sovereignty may solve the identified problems
<i>significant change</i>		

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of a change in policy goals and the introduction of new goals from a fully-fledged paradigm shift that features change in the overarching level of ideas behind policy (Falkner 2016, 224).

	significant discursive change	digital sovereignty being a central <i>and</i> a positive reference point, the latter regarding both relevance and applicability
	significant policy change	the degree, form, <i>or</i> direction of steering is changed so that, in at least one of these dimensions, there is arguably a departure from the status quo ante of a <i>substantial</i> kind, either quantitatively or qualitatively

## V. Research strategy

Methodologically, discursive change may be identified through the analysis of diverse sources, including interviews, surveys, press statements, or through the reconstruction of ideas that are explicitly expressed in public policy documents. Policy change may be identified through the analysis of legislative or executive decisions, public or internal documents, administrative guidelines, or explanatory memoranda, among others.

Since digital policymaking is still a nascent field and subject to significant dynamism, both adopted and proposed measures are of interest as either “policy change” or “proposed policy change”. Official draft policies of direct relevance, such as currently the DSA and Digital Markets Act (DMA), or the proposed AI regulation, represent a potential departure from the status quo of EU policy and are hence of great interest even whilst they have not yet been (fully) adopted.

Moreover, we specifically investigate not only tangible policies but also policy-related discourse. Focusing on discursive practices before the adoption of a specific policy can, for instance, hint at higher or lower probability of forthcoming policy change. Furthermore, it can serve as an indicator of potential translation processes in studies of the specific dynamics of innovation processes. The discursive practices that accompany and follow the adoption of a policy, in turn, help understand redefinition and renegotiation processes of digital sovereignty during the post-decision stage. This results in three levels of analysis, as illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3: Levels of analysis and stages of the policy process**

Level of analysis	Description
Policy	Formally adopted EU policy (possibly not yet in force)
Policy proposals	Official drafts intended to become EU policy, either as a <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• formal EU policy proposal by the EU Commission or</li> <li>• formally adopted position paper of a co-legislating EU institution (European Parliament, Council), i.e. not by individual members / parties / governments.</li> </ul>



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<b>Policy-related discourse</b>	Composed of multiple, often incoherent, policy ideas by different actors contributing to a specific- public policy debate, that may or may not ever get relevant. Two different stages of the policy process could be covered, i.e. before and/or after adoption.
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We do not specify a unified time frame for the analysis but rather allow flexibility in the determination of the relevant reference points for individual policy areas. For example, a new Copyright Directive<sup>4</sup> was adopted in April 2019 while existing policies date back to 1996 and 2001. In contrast, comprehensive EU cybersecurity efforts started much later with the Internal Security Strategy in 2010 (European Commission 2010) and the adoption of the first comprehensive Directive only in 2016 (European Union 2016). Therefore, different reference points in time seem useful for different subfields of EU digitalisation policy.

In order to allow for a coherent interpretation of the different analyses, we propose to use the following categorisation when differentiating between digital policy as a policy area, its different policy sub-areas, and the instruments proposed or applied. We want to address EU digital policy as a policy area with different policy sub-areas, such as data policy, digital services policy, or artificial intelligence policy. In these policy sub-areas, different instruments can be altered and applied, such as the usage of upload filters in the area of copyright or the imposition of fines in the area of data protection (see Table 4).<sup>5</sup>

**Table 4: Scope of analysis, distinguishing between policy areas, sub-areas and instruments**

Policy area	Policy sub-area (examples)	Instruments (examples)
EU digital policy	Data governance	Imposition of fines
	Copyright law	Upload filters
	Digital services regulation	External auditing requirements

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To ensure comparability, we ask authors to clearly situate their research focus with regard to the level (policy / policy proposal(s) / policy-related discourse) and stage in the policy process (before and/or after adoption) as well as with regard to the scope of their analysis (e.g. how many policy sub-areas or instruments). An indication and consistent application of outlined concepts will allow us to compare insights from different studies and to draw conclusions for the broader area of EU digital policy and beyond.

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<sup>4</sup> Directive (EU) 2019/790 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on copyright and related rights in the Digital Single Market and amending Directives 96/9/EC and 2001/29/EC.

<sup>5</sup> Some content of digital policy is by nature cross-cutting and it is dealt with also in other fields adjacent to EU digital policy. For example, digital supply-chain management is often addressed as an issue in context of EU industrial policy. However, this also applies to other fields like for instance EU environmental or trade policy and we propose to pragmatically interpret such cross-cutting topics simultaneously as sub-areas of the broader category in terms of EU digital policy

## VI. Charting Discursive and Policy Change

After having established how discursive change and policy change may unfold and how we may identify and categorise these processes, we now turn to the relationship between discourse and policy and why, or why not, rhetorical changes may be accompanied by policy change. To begin with, there are four potential combinations of discursive and policy change. They depend on whether we identify significant changes in discourse towards digital sovereignty or not, and whether we identify significant changes in policy towards digital sovereignty, or not (see Table 5). As outlined above, we consider discursive change to be significant if it establishes digital sovereignty as – one among at best a few – *idea(s) considered* of both *relevance* and *applicability* to enable policy-makers to develop solutions to policy problems. Otherwise, we would consider digital sovereignty to be (largely) absent from discourse or profoundly disputed as a meaningful strategy. Furthermore, we observe “significant” policy change if policies move *substantially* in either the *degree, form, or direction* towards more control of the digital, be that quantitatively or qualitatively. Again, otherwise policy change towards digital sovereignty would be absent or rather insignificant in overall terms.

**Table 5: Conceptualising the relationship of discursive and policy change towards digital sovereignty**

	<i>Digital Sovereignty is a central and positive discursive reference point</i>	<i>Digital Sovereignty is not a central and positive discursive reference point</i>
<i>Significant policy change towards more sovereignty</i>	Comprehensive change	Inconspicuous change
<i>No significant policy change towards digital sovereignty</i>	Rhetorical change	Absence of change

This leaves us with four potential outcomes. We may observe prominent use of digital sovereignty talk in a policy sub-field with concomitant policy change in the direction of more control of the digital. Under such ‘comprehensive change’, not only has digital sovereignty become the central frame of reference for the policy discourse, but there are also tangible policies or policy initiatives that significantly increase the EU’s control of the digital. Digital sovereignty may as well play a central discursive role while there is no policy change towards increased control. Under such ‘rhetorical’ change, there is much talk of increasing the EU’s control of the digital but no policies or policy initiatives (at least, as yet) that credibly claim to

promote this.<sup>6</sup> We may furthermore observe a lack of references to digital sovereignty or even the deliberate use of other concepts paired with policy change that aligns with our substantive understanding of digital sovereignty as increasing control of the digital. Under such ‘inconspicuous change’, references to digital sovereignty are absent even though there is policy change towards more control. This could happen because people are not interested in digital sovereignty, socialisation processes have established alternative terms, or, more interestingly, actors want to strategically avoid the conceptual ‘baggage’ associated with digital sovereignty. Finally, the concept is absent when there is neither discursive nor policy change of a significant degree towards digital sovereignty.

Last but not least, after having established four possible relations of discourse and policy, we encourage authors to reflect on why, or why not, rhetorical changes have been accompanied by policy change. It is important to stress that we are agnostic about the explanatory role of the discourse on digital sovereignty on policy change. In other words, it is possible that the ideas associated with digital sovereignty causally change the way EU policymakers act in the world through a process of social learning. It is also possible that ideas of digital sovereignty are strategically used (or avoided) by actors to promote or justify goals they pursue for diverse, structurally or institutionally derived reasons. It is even possible that the discourse is epiphenomenal, at best providing a cover for the actual dynamics of policy change. In other words, the relationship between discourse and policy change (or continuity) could be one of ideational causation in which the arguments on digital sovereignty change the interests of policymakers and thus policy (see Blyth 2002; Schmidt 2002); one of strategic constructivism (see Jabko 2012) with actors using digital sovereignty to build coalitions and legitimacy for their policy goals; or one in which the talk of digital sovereignty plays only an epiphenomenal role for the interest-based or institutional politics of policy change or continuity. The significance of discursive change or policy change, therefore, is not dependent on the strategic nature of the discourse. Jabko, for example, in what he calls strategic constructivism, has shown how EU actors strategically used the vague idea of ‘the market’ to build a previously unlikely coalition of actors to support European integration. However, even if ideas are used strategically, contextual elements may lead to “rhetorical entrapment” when inconsistency between actions and a prevalent “community ethos” (Schimmelfennig 2021b, 144) become apparent.

For us, which of these explanatory roles is most plausible is an empirical question (see also Parsons 2016). In our project, we are interested in any findings on the relationship between discourse and policy, regardless of whether they put forward an ideational, institutional, or interest-based approach or a combination thereof. How and why do actors use or avoid digital sovereignty in policy debates? In other words, we would like authors to situate their findings in Table 5 and to reflect on the relationship between its two dimensions.

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<sup>6</sup> „Rhetorical change” is not meant to imply any dishonesty in the sense that actors might postulate or demand change without real intention or desire to see it happen. In contrast, change might simply be preceded by sovereignty discourse.

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