



**Universiteit  
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The Hague



## ***Call for Abstracts***

# **Digital and AI Governance at a Time of Geopolitical Upheaval**

*Leiden University College The Hague, The Netherlands*

**Workshop | 15-16 October 2026**

At the 2026 World Economic Forum in Davos, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney [identified](#) ‘a rupture in the world order, the end of a pleasant fiction and the beginning of a harsh reality, where geopolitics [...] is submitted to no limits, no constraints’. The reception of the speech has been [mixed](#). [For some](#), the speech identified ‘a shocking collapse’ in the international rules-based order. [For others](#), it represented ‘the moment when a system that never protected... the ‘Global South’, is finally being named for what it was’. [While for still others](#), the fact that it has taken ‘not a genocide in Gaza, the starvation of millions of people from civil war in Sudan; crippling sovereign debt of African countries resulting from much vaunted international financial system; the planetary crises of climate change or the pandemic and vaccine crises, but the threatened invasion of Greenland and the weaponization of tariffs by the United States over Western middle powers, clearly demonstrates in whose interests the world order operates’. Regardless of one’s perspective, Carney’s address evoked a sense that the contemporary moment is one of profound [geopolitical upheaval](#), a moment that, Carney suggests, calls for the construction of [a new order](#) grounded in ‘respect for human rights, sustainable development, solidarity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the various states’.

Geopolitical upheaval is not merely a backdrop to digital and AI governance: the two processes are mutually constitutive. Regulatory initiatives spanning the entire digital and AI value chain are being harnessed as instruments of geopolitical influence, while geopolitical tensions are simultaneously constraining, accelerating or undermining governance efforts between rival powers. Amidst the upheaval, the vocabulary of human rights has emerged as one focal area of contestation, simultaneously serving as a normative framework, a site of geopolitical instrumentalisation, and a terrain over which the meaning of rights themselves is fought over. Meanwhile, non-state entities and communities are mobilising to transform both geopolitical configurations and digital/AI governance.

At the ***ideological*** level, states are advancing [rival visions](#) for digital and AI governance, with a diversity of regulatory models vying for influence. Beyond states, Big Tech companies, international civil society organisations, as well as international and regional bodies such as the Council of Europe, the European Union, BRICS, the African Union, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, are also advancing transnational regimes for digital and AI governance. The regulatory mosaic that is emerging from these overlapping and often competing visions is one [marked by](#) instability, conflict, and fragmentation - with different visions carrying distinct, and at times conflicting, implications for whose rights are protected, on what basis, and through which mechanisms of accountability.

At the ***material*** level, geopolitical tensions are rife over the supply and governance of [critical raw materials](#) and [advanced semiconductors](#), [the construction of data centres](#) often impacting [local water access](#) and [\(sustainable\) energy use](#), and [the disposal of e-Waste](#), with each dimension

carrying profound consequences for, *inter alia*, the rights to health, adequate standard of living, and a healthy environment for affected communities and ecosystems. The Trump administration's appetite to invade mineral-rich states has also been [condemned](#) as a 'new' imperialism, while the social and ecological degradation that pervades digital and AI value chains has been characterised as extractive in ways that continue [colonial dynamics](#) of resource extraction, labour exploitation, and epistemic violence. These dynamics raise significant questions about the relationship between rights-based frameworks, enduring logics of colonialism, and resistance movements from the margins.

At the **socio-technical** level, digital platforms and AI systems have become entangled with geopolitical conflicts. Situations of mass atrocity, including those in Ukraine and Gaza, have become [laboratories of technological experimentation and weaponization](#) that raise critical questions for international human rights and humanitarian law - with private companies [shaping how technology is harnessed in conflict zones](#). While marginalised communities use digital platforms to mobilise their solidarity movements and challenge state repression, those same digital platforms have become instruments for [the promotion of xenophobic nationalism](#) by transnational networks of far-right political groups and Big Tech oligarchs and oligopolies. As geopolitical tensions rise, digital dependencies on US and Chinese technology companies are being subject to growing scrutiny underpinned by narratives around [digital sovereignty](#), narratives that for privacy advocates carry genuine human rights implications, but also risk being weaponised to justify intensified forms of surveillance and digital repression. Meanwhile, [a geopolitics of connectivity](#) has emerged with the rise of private companies shaping Internet access and information flows in ways that condition the very exercise of rights and impact the fabric of the international order.

This workshop seeks to examine these dynamics from a diversity of disciplinary perspectives, bringing together scholars in law, international relations, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, media and communication studies, technology studies, and related fields. The aim is to nurture a multidisciplinary conversation that critically assesses the relationship between geopolitical upheaval and digital/AI governance.

### **Workshop Sub-Themes**

The workshop organisers invite abstract submissions addressing any of the following interconnected themes (*the sub-questions listed should be viewed as illustrative*):

#### **1. Geopolitical Visions of Digital/AI Governance**

*How are different actors conceptualizing and advancing distinct regulatory visions for digital and AI governance?*

- Comparative analysis of domestic, regional, transnational, and international regulatory visions for digital/AI governance, including but not limited to the role of rights-based frameworks and approaches
- Visions from the margins including decolonial, (eco)feminist, queer, Indigenous, and local movements and perspectives
- Digital sovereignty narratives
- Extraterritorial reach of major regulatory frameworks, including but not limited to the human rights challenges posed by gaps in accountability across borders
- Future pathways for global, regional, or transnational digital/AI governance frameworks

## 2. **Geopolitical Contestations over Digital/AI Governance**

*How are geopolitical contestations constraining, accelerating, or transforming digital and AI governance initiatives?*

- The impact of sanctions and tariff regimes on technology governance
- Export controls and technology transfer restrictions (e.g. concerning semiconductors, spyware, dual-use technologies etc.)
- Competition and tensions over the supply of critical minerals (including environmental degradation and labour exploitation), data centre construction (including water and energy consumptions), and e-Waste disposal
- Data localization requirements and cross-border data governance
- Community, activist, and practitioner perspectives including resisting, refusing, and practicing otherwise digital/AI governance

## 3. **Geopolitical Conflicts and Digital/AI Governance**

*How are geopolitical conflicts, including armed conflicts, shaping and accelerating technological developments and exposing governance gaps?*

- Governance of AI systems and digital platforms in conflict zones
- Community uses and subversions of digital/AI governance in conflict
- NGO perspectives, experiences, and critiques of digital/AI governance in conflict
- Digital media and disinformation in conflict zones
- Corporate control over cloud services, satellite systems, digital communications infrastructure and AI capabilities in conflict settings
- Drone warfare, computer vision, and AI-decision support systems, including but not limited to challenges to international humanitarian law
- Mass surveillance and biometric identification
- Platform governance and transnational networks of far-right political and technology actors posing challenges to democratic processes

### **Guidelines for Submissions**

Abstracts (max. 2,000 characters) should be submitted via the online form [here](#) no later than **12 June 2026**. We aim to conclude the selection process by the middle of July 2026. The two-day workshop is scheduled to be held at Leiden University College The Hague on **15-16 October 2026**.

Selected participants will be invited to submit draft working papers of 5,000 words in advance of the workshop, with the aim of subsequently publishing a selection of the papers in a Special Issue of an academic journal. We particularly welcome submissions from early-career researchers and scholars from diverse geographical and disciplinary backgrounds.

### **Financial Support**

The workshop is funded by the Netherlands Network for Human Rights Research, Leiden University College The Hague, and the Erasmus Center of Law and Digitalization through the Sectorplan SSH-Breed on Digitalization. A limited amount of financial support for travel and accommodation is, therefore, available to speakers who have exhausted other potential sources of funding. A hybrid option may also be offered to enhance participation.

### **Convenors**

*Emelie Andersin, Ph.D. Fellow in International Law, Leiden University College The Hague*

*Dr. Julia Krämer, Assistant Professor of Data Protection Law and Empirical Legal Studies, Erasmus School of Law*

*Dr. Densua Mumford, Assistant Professor of International Relations, Leiden University College The Hague*

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