

Call for Papers

Sociological Inquiries into International Law in a Polarized World: Markets, National Security, and Democracy

13-14 November 2025, Utrecht University

We live in an era marked by heightened polarization. International lawyers and actors are increasingly confronted with a wide array of challenges, stemming from populist politics, migration, climate change, supply chain disruptions, economic inequality, disputes over resources, and armed conflicts. In turn, attempts to address these issues are frequently criticized for being inadequate, for serving the interests of a privileged few, or as illustrating the unequal application of legal norms. These demands place significant strain on actors and institutions in the international legal system.

While skepticism about the effectiveness of international law is not new, we suggest that there is something different about the current developments. The quickening turn to a multipolar world, combined with heightened polarization between and within national societies, present two sources of pressure on international legal institutions, and on everyday practices within them.

The point of departure of this workshop is the recognition that international law operates within - and is shaped by - diverse social processes and factors, such as social identity, formal and informal hierarchies, socialization, collective memory, and socio-cognitive frameworks.

Against this backdrop, the **Sixth Workshop on Sociological Inquiries into International Law** will be held at Utrecht University on **13–14 November 2025**. Participants will explore how sociological perspectives can deepen our understanding of the range of current challenges for the international legal system, their effects within and beyond legal institutions, and the potential responses offered to these challenges.

We invite submissions employing diverse sociological tools, frameworks, and theories to examine topics including, but not limited to:

- The rise of populism, government responses to popular movements, and threats to democratic practices and the rule of law
- The impact of double standards on the legitimacy of international law and the authority of those enforcing or seeking to reform it
- The role of international courts and tribunals, the politicization of international institutions, and their potential to transform the legal system
- The expansion of sanctions and the increasing use of economic and financial restrictions
- Economic unilateralism aimed at de-risking and protecting national security
- The proliferation of economic nationalism and new industrial policies
- Domestic and international efforts to address climate change and their effects on global trade and development
- Technological advancements, including hybrid warfare, digitalization of products, artificial intelligence, digital surveillance, and emerging international legal regimes

- Immigration and debates over border control

We encourage submissions on these and related themes focusing on sociological approaches to international law. The workshop will be held **in person** on **13-14 November 2025**, in the Johanna Hudig Gebouw building at the Utrecht University School of Law.

To apply, please electronically submit an abstract of maximum **300 words** and your **CV** using the following [Google form](#) by **31 March 2025**. If you have any questions, please contact Alexandra Hofer (a.s.hofer@uu.nl)

Applicants will be informed of the results of the selection process by **30 April 2025**. If selected, we will ask you to submit a discussion paper of no more than **3,000 words** by **13 October 2025**.

Unfortunately, we cannot cover participants' expenses related to travel and accommodation. However, Utrecht University *may* offer a limited number of scholarships to contribute to the travel and accommodation expenses of selected early career researchers who do not have access to sufficient funding. To apply for a scholarship, please include in your application, in addition to your abstract and CV, a short motivational letter stating why you are not able to cover your travel expenses, how much funding you would need, and how participation in the workshop fits your research plans.

Please take note of the following timeline:

- 31 March 2025: deadline for submission of abstracts and scholarship applications
- By 30 April, applicants will be informed of the results of the selection process
- 13 October: submission of discussion papers (about 3,000 words)
- 13-14 November: in-person workshop

Steering Committee: Alexandra Hofer, Birte Böök and Luca Pasquet (all from Utrecht University School of Law), Sungjoon Cho (Chicago-Kent College of Law), Moshe Hirsch (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Ron Levi (University of Toronto), and Mikael Rask Madsen (iCourts, University of Copenhagen).

The workshop is organised by Centre for Shared Regulation and Enforcement in Europe ([RENFORCE](#)) in cooperation with the newly established Utrecht University Research Platform on Peace Security and Human Rights, the Utrecht Centre for Accountability and Liability Law ([UCALL](#)), and the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights ([SIM](#)).