

Digital Power and Democratic Futures: Critical Perspectives on Governance in the Digital Age

Invitation

Final Conference of the Research Group “Politics of Digitalisation”
June 4-5, 2026

The final conference of the research group “Politics of Digitalisation” brings together researchers and practitioners to critically examine the digital transformation as a field of political struggle, institutional change, and normative contestation. Across two days, the event reflects on how digitalisation reconfigures power, governance, and democracy – and what it means to study these processes critically.

Opening Event

The conference opens on the evening of June 4 with a panel discussion: *“The Broken Promise of the Internet: Democracy and Digital Power at a Critical Juncture?”* The panel revisits the shifting relationship between digitalisation and democracy. Once celebrated as a vehicle for individual self-determination, the Internet is now often seen as dominated by powerful tech monopolies and geopolitical rivalries. Were early hopes misplaced? Which critical junctures were overlooked? And what can we learn about democracy’s resilience and capacity for self-repair?

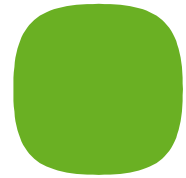
Discussants:

Prof. Dr. Robin Mansell (*Professor emerita*, London School of Economics)

Prof. Dr. Thorsten Thiel (Universität Erfurt)

Prof. Dr. Jamal Shahin (Brussels School of Governance / University of Amsterdam / United Nations University-CRIS)

Moderation by Prof. Dr. Jeanette Hofmann (WZB Berlin Social Science Center / Humboldt Institute for Internet and Society)



Workshop Day (for invited participants)

The workshop day on June 5 is structured into four thematic sessions. Across them, we ask: How can we conceptualize and investigate power and domination in digital societies? Have their manifestations changed – and if so, how? How did we move from Internet governance to digital geopolitics? What role does the state play in regulating, enabling, or reshaping digital infrastructures and public spheres? And how does the digitalisation of the state itself affect public authority and accountability?

Each session features four input contributions, including one from a practitioner, followed by an open debate designed to foster exchange across academic and policy communities.

Session 1: From Global Internet Governance to Digital Geopolitics examines the shift from early cyberlibertarian imaginaries of horizontal coordination toward state-centered projects of digital sovereignty and security. It interrogates how geopolitical and geoeconomic framings redefine the “goods to be protected” and reconfigure relations between states and corporations.

Session 2: On Power and Domination reflects on conceptual and methodological resources for critical digitalisation research. It explores architectural, economic, and discursive forms of power, and discusses how domination is stabilized through technologies, regulation, and institutional practice.

Session 3: Critical Perspectives on Digital Regulation and Statecraft focuses on the evolving interplay between platforms, algorithms, and regulatory authority. Rather than assuming regulatory erosion, it investigates how states recalibrate legal frameworks, enforcement capacities, and forms of statecraft under conditions of algorithmic governance.

Session 4: Communication and Platforms addresses platform governance, legal responses to disinformation, and transformations of the public sphere. It explores how digital communication infrastructures reshape democratic discourse and how regulatory interventions seek to safeguard – or redefine – the conditions of public debate.
