

Making Sense of International Law and Politics in the 21st Century

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International law and associated norms and institutions have been central to understanding the post-Cold War rules-based international order within international studies. The multilateral arrangements on which this order has relied, however, are under growing stress across sectors, as state and non-state actors seek to challenge, reshape, and withdraw from global and regional institutions and legal regimes. Ongoing developments across economic, environmental, human rights/humanitarian, and security-related spheres have given scholars and policy makers cause for concern as to the resilience and future prospects of international law as an instrument of international governance.

Do domestic, transnational and international challenges, such as growing nationalism, authoritarianism and illiberal democracy, alongside shifting global and regional power balances, call into question the stability and sustainability of international governance through a rules-based order? Or is it the case that international law's "fundamental institutions" are sound and remain fit-for-purpose? Can we speak of international law as "under pressure" across the dimensions highlighted in scholarship, the media and policy discourse, or are we merely witnessing another passing phase in international law's long history as a "discipline of crisis"?

The proposed roundtable will address these and related questions, considering from multiple disciplinary perspectives – including IR, law, and history – the manifestations, drivers, and implications of international law's current "crisis" across dimensions in an (apparently) unstable international political environment, and assessing the challenges and opportunities facing governments and other international political actors and institutions.

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