# AI without borders? Navigating data sovereignty and human rights in a fragmented world

*Tuesday 14 October 2025 11:30 (1h 30m)*

Introduction

This workshop will examine how the evolving architectures of data policy and AI governance challenge traditional notions of political sovereignty, including state sovereignty, the sovereignty of the people, and the sovereignty of the individual human being, as recognized in the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The United Nations Charter upholds the "sovereign equality of all its Members"(Article 2.1), affirming the right of states to self-determination and governance without external domination. However, the dominance of transnational tech corporations, extraterritorial data flows, and private AI infrastructures now blur jurisdictional boundaries and pose direct challenges to state control over digital infrastructures and decision-making processes. This has led to a growing demand for digital and data sovereignty—where states assert the right to regulate, localize, and govern data produced within their borders.

The UDHR, in parallel, affirms the inherent dignity, freedom, and equality of all individuals (Articles 1 and 2) and protects individual sovereignty through rights such as privacy (Article 12), freedom of opinion and expression (Article 19), and participation in governance (Article 21). Yet, automated systems that profile, manipulate, or surveil citizens challenge these very freedoms.

The session will draw on practical and policy insights from global processes such as:
• The United Nations Charter
• The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
• The Munich Convention on AI, Data, and Human Rights (2024–25)
• The whitepaper: 'Promoting and Advancing Human Rights in Global AI Ecosystems: The Need for A Comprehensive Framework under International Law'
• The African Commission's Draft Study on Human and Peoples'Rights and AI (2025)
• The UN Global Digital Compact (2024)
• The UNESCO's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021).

Format
Workshop Format and Detailed Agenda
Interactive Workshop Session –90 minutes
This session is designed to foster deep engagement, practical insight-sharing, and collaborative policy thinking across global, regional, and disciplinary divides. It combines expert framing with structured group discussions and plenary synthesis to address complex questions around sovereignty, AI, and human rights.
The session format follows four core principles:
1. Participatory: All attendees contribute to dialogue, not just listen.
2. Multi-perspective: Structured to reflect legal, ethical, cultural, and geopolitical diversity.
3. Action-oriented: Designed to generate recommendations and pathways for future work.
4. Grounded: Built on real frameworks like the UN Charter, UDHR, Munich Convention, and regional AI strategies.

Workshop Agenda (90 Minutes)
Additional speakers tbc:
• African Commission on Human and Peoples'Rights representative (TBC) –Regional perspectives on collective and peoples'rights in AI governance
• Global South civil society or technologist (TBC) –Challenges of asserting local digital sovereignty in the face of global AI platforms

1. Opening and Scene-Setting Presentations (20 minutes)
Moderated by session chair
Purpose: Establish foundational concepts of sovereignty (state, peoples, individual) and introduce global legal and policy frameworks relating to AI and human rights.
• 5 min —Introduction and workshop goals
• 5 min —Presentation: "Sovereignty in the Age of AI: From the UN Charter to the Digital Realm"
• 5 min —Regional insight: African and Latin American perspectives on sovereignty and AI
• 5 min —Legal perspective: The Munich Convention on AI, Data, and Human Rights
Speakers: Global experts from law, ethics, and policy communities, including contributors to the Munich Convention.

2. Breakout Group Discussions (30 minutes)
Participants will divide into four facilitated breakout groups, each tackling a key sovereignty dimension. Each group includes a facilitator and rapporteur and will address 2–3 guiding questions rooted in current international law and AI ethics frameworks.
Group 1 –State Sovereignty
Topic: National governance of cross-border AI and data regimes
Focus: Data localization, extraterritorial digital infrastructure, compliance with human rights
Group 2 –Sovereignty of Peoples
Topic: Collective rights, digital democracy, and algorithmic governance
Focus: Citizen participation, access to information, community data rights
Group 3 –Individual Sovereignty
Topic: Autonomy, data protection, and consent in AI systems
Focus: Privacy (UDHR Article 12), meaningful consent, surveillance ethics
Group 4 –Bridging Sovereignties
Topic: Harmonizing local values with global digital governance
Focus: Cross-cultural rights recognition, UN principles vs. local ethics, legal interoperability
Participants will discuss:
• Opportunities to use AI and sovereignty to advance human rights
• Key risks and legal/policy gaps
• Practical actions for future governance

3. Plenary Synthesis and Panel Response (30 minutes)
Each group reports back (5 min per group), followed by discussion.
• 20 min —Plenary synthesis: Group rapporteurs present key findings
• 10 min —Panel response: Short reflections from a multi-region expert panel (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, Europe)
This segment will explore cross-cutting tensions and possible reconciliations between sovereignty and universal rights in AI governance.

4. Closing and Outcome Framing (10 minutes)
Moderator summarizes key outcomes and presents a draft outline for a post-workshop document:
"Action Note on Sovereignty and Rights in AI Governance"
• Invitation for ongoing collaboration via CODATA, CoARA-ERIP, or a dedicated follow-up task force
• Next steps for aligning this work with SciDataCon and IDW open science values
Participants will be invited to co-sign or contribute to the post-workshop output.

Expected Outcomes
• A deeper understanding of how international human rights frameworks interact with emerging digital sovereignties
• Strategic insights into how sovereignty claims can be balanced in AI governance across state, community, and individual levels
• Contribution to the formation of a global action framework or policy brief on AI, sovereignty, and rights-based digital governance

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**Track Classification:** SciDataCon2025 Specific Themes: Empowering the global data community for impact, equity, and inclusion