



### *Call for papers*

## **Contestation in international law**

Pre-Conference Workshop to the 2026 ESIL Annual Conference in Málaga  
2 or 3 September 2026

Why and how do actors contest international legal norms? When does contestation amount to conflict, and what role do persuasion, reinterpretation, or even appropriation play in contestation efforts? Who participates in these processes, in which settings do they unfold, and how?

Scholars increasingly recognize that international legal norms are shaped, challenged, defended, and transformed through processes of contestation. Such contestation may manifest as open resistance, strategic reinterpretation, persuasive engagement, or creative appropriation. These dynamics shape not only whether international law is followed, but how it evolves and whose interests it serves.

The growing cross-fertilization between international law and the social sciences offers novel, empirically grounded insights into how norm contestation operates in practice. Social science approaches enable us to better understand: (a) which actors engage in contestation and what drives them; (b) where and how contestation unfolds; and (c) how contestation reshapes norms and with what effects.

Aimed at opening avenues for early career and established researchers interested in interdisciplinary engagements, this workshop will address different dimensions of contestation of international legal norms at the intersection of international law and the social sciences. Potential contributors are invited to submit proposals that address one or more of the following lines of inquiry:

**(a) Actors and drivers of contestation:** Who contests international legal norms and why? Under what conditions does contestation escalate into open conflict or backlash, and when does it remain a constructive or constitutive process? What determines how a given contestation attempt is perceived positively or negatively? Do the drivers and dynamics of contestation vary across different fields of international law (e.g. human rights, trade, environmental law, humanitarian law)?

**(b) Settings and practices of contestation:** Where does contestation take place and does the location of contestation determine the shape and nature of contestation? What modes of contestation are formally allowed, informally tolerated, or openly frowned upon?

**(c) Effects and transformations of contestation:** Who benefits from contestation? How does contestation lead to reinterpretation, appropriation, or instrumentalization of international norms? What determines whether its effects shape into strengthening, weakening, fragmenting, or transforming international legal order?

We welcome contributions drawing on insights from psychology, political science, sociology, economics, behavioral science, anthropology, linguistics, and other relevant disciplines. Participants are encouraged to clearly articulate the theoretical framework and methodological approach guiding their analysis, and to reflect on how perspectives from other disciplines advance our understanding of norm contestation in international law.

Proposals may focus on a specific branch of international law, particular norms across different regimes, or the international legal system more broadly. We particularly encourage empirically grounded contributions that engage meaningfully with one or more social science disciplines and demonstrate the added value of interdisciplinary inquiry.

### **Details**

The workshop will be held in-person in Málaga. It is scheduled to take place on 2 September 2026 (15:00–18:00) or 3 September 2026 (09:00–12:00) (date TBC).

We are looking for participants who are willing to present ‘think pieces’ of approximately 2-3,000 words<sup>1</sup> or draft articles of max. 8,000 words that will structure the discussion and debate at the meeting. The IG meeting will be held in a conventional workshop-style format.

If you wish to contribute, please send us an abstract which includes a title, an abstract of maximum 300 words (covering the core question, sources of data and methods, if applicable, and key argument/findings) and a short bio (in the same file) to [esilsocsci@gmail.com](mailto:esilsocsci@gmail.com). Please CC the IG convenors, Zuzanna Godzimirska ([zuzanna.godzimirska@jur.ku.dk](mailto:zuzanna.godzimirska@jur.ku.dk)), Ezgi Yildiz

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that, due to their short length, the think pieces will not be eligible for the ESIL Young Scholar Prize 2026.

([e.yildiz@bowdoin.edu](mailto:e.yildiz@bowdoin.edu)), Tommaso Soave ([soavet@ceu.edu](mailto:soavet@ceu.edu)) and Wim Zimmermann ([wim.zimmermann@plus.ac.at](mailto:wim.zimmermann@plus.ac.at)), and write 'ESIL SSIL Abstract - Contestation in international law' in the e-mail's subject field.

Abstracts should be received by **10 April 2026**. Submitters will be informed of the outcome of the selection procedure by 24 April 2026.

Depending on the number and quality of the submissions, the IG convenors may consider turning workshop contributions into a series of blog posts on EJIL:Talk! and/or a Special Issue in an internationally renowned journal.

The Interest Group is unable to provide funding for travel and accommodation. Selected speakers will be expected to bear the costs of their own travel and accommodation. Some [ESIL Travel Grants](#) and [ESIL Carers' Grants](#) will be available to offer partial financial support to speakers who have exhausted other potential sources of funding.

Please visit the [ESIL Annual Conference website](#) for all relevant information about the event.

**All participants, including speakers and chairs, at ESIL Interest Group workshops are required to register for the event and more detailed information will follow in due course.**

Selected speakers should indicate their interest in being considered for the ESIL Early-Career Scholar Prize, if they meet the [eligibility conditions](#) as stated on the ESIL website. **The ESIL Secretariat must be informed of all selected speakers who wish to be considered for the Prize before 30 April.**