2026 Report of the ESIL Interest Group on Critical Approaches to International Law

The ESIL Interest Group (IG) on Critical Approaches to International Law was established in 2025 by Julia Emtseva, Kanad Bagchi, Tim Lindgren, Valeria Vázquez Guevara, and Rohini Sen. The IG was founded with the aim of creating a distinct and much-needed space within ESIL for intradisciplinary scholars of international law, with a particular emphasis on supporting early-career researchers. The IG has three interrelated objectives (see details in 2025 Report): (1) foregrounding critical perspectives; (2) community building and solidarity; and (3) contributing to intellectual diversity within ESIL.

Throughout 2026 the IG has remained committed to its objectives and to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment that places alternative, marginalized and new voices and experiences at the center of international legal research, practice and community. The space opened by this IG within ESIL has become critically important at a time in which the promises of peace and security of international law and its institutions are being tested by new wars, climate change, increasing socio-economic inequalities, racism, geopolitical tensions, and even by generational scepticism toward the current international legal system.

To pursue its commitment and achieve its interrelated objectives, the IG has undertaken the following **activities in 2026:**

(1) "A Chat with the Author" Seminar Series. This is an online, seminar-style discussion series dedicated to exploring new scholarship that expands how we understand international law through critical perspectives. Each session centered on a recently published piece of work, introduced by its author, and followed by an open conversation with the audience. The aim was to create a collaborative space for collective thinking, reflective engagement, and the shared development of ideas. The first two sessions we hosted the following authors:

- Ntina Tzouvala (Associate Professor, UNSW Sydney), introducing her article "Critical International Law amongst the Ruins" on 20 January 2026. We had about 70+ attendees.

- Yiling Wang (Assistant Professor, University of Macau), introducing her article "Locating TWAIL Scholarship in China" on 21 April 2026. We had about 15 attendees.
- Sujith Koonan (Jawaharlal Nehru University) and Haris Jamil (Melbourne Law School), introducing their article "The State, State Practice and International Law: A Critical Examination" on October/November 2026 (TBC).

(2) Pre-conference workshop under the title "Conflict and International Law: Beyond the Promise of Peace" (ESIL Málaga 2 September 2026). Our workshop aimed to further complicate a discipline in crisis. International law was built on an emancipatory promise that legal norms could contain violence and orient communities toward durable peace. The contributions to this workshop, thus, asked what kind of peace international law can deliver, on whose terms, and at what cost. We jointly examined international law at the threshold between conflict and peace, discussing the roles of those who practice, critique, and reimagine international law in reckoning with the responsibilities that our expertise and positions entail. The workshop had 10 presenters organized into two panels. Presentations in the first panel ranged from: Donald Trump's Board of Peace; the tensions between peace and violence embedded within (*pharmakonic*) international law; new conceptions of the use of force considering geopolitical shifts; or questioning the role of the economy in peace-making. The second panel sought to tackle the relationship between violence and meaningful peace by asking questions on violence, race, republicanism and the possibilities of a people-led international-law making. The workshop brought together presenters at different stages of their academic careers, from different parts of the world (albeit based at universities in the Global North, given funding constrains etc).

Next Steps

Four members of the IG (Kanad Bagchi, Tim Lindgren, Valeria Vázquez Guevara, and Rohini Sen) have decided to step down from their roles and make space for new members to join the IG. Julia Emtseva has kindly agreed to stay on to support the transition. Elections for the new IG will take place soon, and we feel it is only fair that the next steps are determined by the new group, bringing fresh ideas and perspectives to the table.

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ESIL IG CAIL, Coordinating Committee Members