

# The Global Governance of Artificial Intelligence

Actor Preferences, Bargaining Dynamics, and Institutional Design

Johannes Geith





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**Johannes Geith**

Academic dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science at Stockholm University to be publicly defended on Friday 12 June 2026 at 13.00 in hörsal 10, hus E, Universitetsvägen 10 E.

### **Abstract**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) poses one of the most consequential governance challenges of the 21st century. Consequently, a range of actors, including states, international organizations, and non-state actors, recognize AI as a critical domain for strategic competition and risk mitigation. While policymakers around the world grapple with the question of whether and how to regulate AI, the focus of attention has recently shifted to the global level. Yet to date, we lack systematic knowledge about the patterns and drivers of global AI governance. To that end, this dissertation provides a systematic analysis of three areas of the governance process that hold considerable promise for deepening our understanding of the global governance of AI: actor preferences, bargaining dynamics, and institutional design. Through four independent papers, this dissertation makes substantive theoretical and empirical contributions to address shortcomings in prior research. Theoretically, it develops novel and testable arguments about the global governance of AI. Empirically, it spearheads a comprehensive analysis of global AI governance through large-scale data collection efforts for each of the singular papers, utilizing various methods for descriptive and explanatory analysis. The dissertation finds that global AI governance is characterized by three core patterns: heterogeneous actors, institutional fragmentation, and a predominance of non-binding rules. Two factors emerge consistently across the papers as drivers of these patterns: divergence of interests among relevant actors and uncertainty about AI. This dissertation makes contributions to three overarching bodies of literature: AI governance, global digital governance, and global governance.

**Keywords:** *Global governance, artificial intelligence, emerging technology, preferences, bargaining, institutional design.*

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To my parents and in  
memory of my  
grandparents.



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*Stockholm, May 2026*



## Abbreviations

AGI	Artificial General Intelligence
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ASI	Artificial Superintelligence
CCW	Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons
CoE	Council of Europe
EU	European Union
GGE	Group on Governmental Experts
GPAI	Global Partnership on AI
GPU	Graphics Processing Unit
IO	International Organization
LAWS	Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems
LLM	Large Language Model
ML	Machine Learning
NSA	Non-State Actors
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UNODA	UN Office for Disarmament Affairs



## Introduction

The 2020s appear to mark the dawn of the “Age of Artificial Intelligence (AI)” (Kissinger et al., 2021). The promises of AI are vast, spanning productivity gains and economic prosperity, as well as breakthroughs in medical research and disease detection. Some of these hopes have already translated into measurable effects. As generative AI is being adopted faster than personal computers and the internet, 79% of workers report using it regularly in at least one business function, as do four in five university students (Sajadieh et al., 2026). As a result, Nvidia—a computer chipmaker, whose graphics processing units (GPU) are widely used in AI systems—is now the world’s first company to have crossed a valuation of \$5 trillion (Duffy, 2025). Across most countries, AI-related labor demand is now outpacing overall hiring growth (Sajadieh et al., 2026). AlphaFold2, an AI tool revealed in 2020, can generate reliable predictions for virtually any protein; its database now contains more than 200 million entries (Callaway, 2025). John Jumper—a 2024 Nobel Prize laureate in chemistry—put the invention’s significance in perspective: “I’m certain that there are people that will go home from the hospital because of AlphaFold2.” (Callaway, 2025, p. 259).

Yet, alongside extraordinary growth and promise lies significant potential for risk and disruption. Some suggest that AI will be “a big bang moment ... with the potential to remake politics, economies, and societies” (Bremmer and Suleyman, 2023, p. 2), posing a range of unpredictable challenges (e.g., Dafoe, 2022; Nitzberg and Zysman, 2022; Maas, 2025). AI is—and will continue—producing outcomes with problematic consequences. This includes fundamental issues of fairness, transparency, and accountability (e.g., Cath, 2018; Mittelstadt et al., 2016), labor displacement (e.g., Acemoglu and Restrepo, 2018; Acemoglu et al., 2022; Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014), or unprecedented destruction and a reshaping of the global balance of power through military AI (Horowitz et al., 2022). AI risks may stem from unintentional misuse or intentional malicious use (Brundage et al., 2018). Unintentional consequences include, for example, the risk of technical failure. Technical failures of AI continue

to increase sharply and hallucination rates across leading AI models vary widely, ranging from 22% to 94% (Sajadieh et al., 2026).<sup>1</sup> Intentional AI-driven misinformation threatens to accelerate polarization and erode core foundations of liberal democracies (Acemoglu, 2023), while the concentration of AI power in a small number of tech corporations erodes the authority of democratic publics in favor of private elites (Dafoe, 2018)—a dynamic captured by the notions of a *Tech Coup* (Schaake, 2024), *Technology Trap* (Frey, 2019), and *Techlash* (Wheeler, 2023).

The most severe concerns, however, involve existential risks. This includes AI-driven human extinction (e.g., Bengio, 2023; Bengio et al., 2024; Yudkowsky and Soares, 2025). Such concerns are reinforced by advances toward Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)—systems capable of reasoning and problem-solving at levels comparable to and potentially exceeding human cognition (Bostrom, 2014)—and, at the extreme, Artificial Superintelligence (ASI), referring to AI that surpasses humans at virtually all cognitive tasks (Yudkowsky and Soares, 2025). Notably, recent work suggests that current AI systems may already satisfy several criteria for general intelligence (Chen et al., 2026).

AI poses a governance challenge, understood as a mismatch between existing institutions and the demands for governing the risks and opportunities it presents. Specifically, this dissertation proceeds from a twofold observation. First, AI constitutes not merely a governance challenge, but a *global governance challenge*. Many AI systems are primarily developed in transnational processes by private actors operating across multiple jurisdictions. Once AI is deployed, many of its externalities—that is, its positive or negative spillover effects—are cross-boundary in nature (Tallberg et al., 2023).<sup>2</sup> Second, there is considerable evidence that a range of actors—including states, international organizations (IOs), and non-state actors (NSAs)—have begun and intensified efforts to govern global AI-related risks and reap

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<sup>1</sup>Hallucinations commonly refer to an AI model presenting false information as a fact. Typical causes include limitations in training data, model architecture, and problems with the probabilistic response generation of Large Language Models (LLMs) (Kathiresan, 2025)

<sup>2</sup>For an overview of the global governance challenges raised by AI, see Maas (2025, pp. 5–7)

its benefits. Calls for effective regulatory guardrails have grown increasingly urgent, even as this task is regarded as a “balancing act ... more high stakes than any policymakers have attempted” (Bremmer and Suleyman, 2023, p. 11). Regulatory efforts span public, public-private, and private modes of governance. Examples of public governance include multilateral bodies—such as the High-Level Advisory Board on AI and the Independent International Scientific Panel—and binding legislation like the European Union (EU) AI Act. Public-private initiatives include the Global Partnership on AI (GPAI) and the AI summit series. Private governance encompasses voluntary safety commitments by leading AI developers and industry bodies such as the Frontier Model Forum.

To date, however, we lack systematic knowledge about the global governance of AI—understood as the regulatory processes at global and regional levels of governance, with the purpose of shaping the development and deployment of AI.<sup>3</sup> This dissertation seeks to address this gap through a descriptive and explanatory research question. First, *how* is AI being governed beyond the nation-state; and second, *what* accounts for the observed patterns and forms of global AI governance? To address these questions on the patterns and drivers of global AI governance, I focus on three factors that reflect the sequential logic of the governance process. First, I examine *actor preferences*—that is, how relevant actors order possible governance outcomes. Second, I examine *bargaining dynamics*—that is, how actors pursue their preferences in multilateral negotiations, and which actors—and why—prove more successful in obtaining outcomes in line with their preferences. Third, I examine *institutional design*—that is, how institutions can be characterized in terms of their form and what explains differences in their design.

While research on AI governance has expanded in both depth and scope, it remains limited in several important respects—descriptive-exploratory rather than explanatory in orientation (e.g., Maas, 2025; Schmitt, 2021; Roberts et al., 2024), confined to selected AI applications,

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<sup>3</sup>Note that the notion of global AI governance does not indicate that there will be a singular agreement or institution governing AI, nor does this dissertation suggest that this is feasible or even necessary.

issue areas, and institutions (e.g., Badell and Schmitt, 2022; Canfil and Kania, 2024; Velasco et al., 2025), and focused on the implications of governance fragmentation rather than its causes (e.g., Cihon et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2024).<sup>4</sup> A substantial body of work addresses national-level AI governance (e.g., Djeflal et al., 2022; D. S. Schiff, 2023), yet the insights generated may not straightforwardly translate to the global level.

Existing research on global governance, and global digital governance specifically, remains limited in its ability to account for the distinctive features of AI. On the one hand, while the implications from AI may not be radically different from those of earlier general purpose technologies (Frey, 2019)—defined as pervasive technologies with significant aggregate and long-term impact (Crafts, 2021)—the scale of societal change it is expected to produce, and its potential as a source of power for state and non-state actors alike, make it a pressing governance challenge. On the other hand, several features already distinguish AI from other issue areas in global governance in ways that go beyond the anticipation of large-scale societal changes. These include, for example, the remarkably dominant role of private tech firms and a high level of uncertainty about AI’s capabilities—whether positive or negative (e.g., Tallberg, 2026; Maas, 2025). While historical analogies may offer some guidance (e.g., Hatz, 2026), AI’s considerably broader scope of application limits the insights they can yield.

As AI emerges as the defining technology of our time, this dissertation provides a systematic theoretical and empirical account of global AI governance to describe and explain its patterns and drivers.

The remainder of this introduction is structured as follows: I begin by discussing the aim and research questions, provide conceptual clarifications, highlight the dissertation’s empirical and theoretical contribution, and summarize key findings, while outlining limitations. I then review the relevant literature, before I present the overarching analytical framework. Next, I discuss the empirical material and methodological choices for each individual paper, before

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<sup>4</sup>This is exemplified by a substantial literature on AI ideal governance, developing suitable proposals of how AI ought to be governed. For a discussion on this concept, see Dafoe (2018).

concluding with a summary of the four papers themselves.

## **Aim and Research Questions**

This dissertation aims to advance our understanding of the patterns and drivers of global AI governance. To this end, it addresses two overarching research questions:

- *How is AI governed beyond the nation-state?*
- *What explains the observed patterns and forms of AI governance at the global level?*

To answer these two overarching questions, the dissertation focuses on three factors that reflect the sequential stages of the governance process, namely actor preferences, bargaining dynamics, and institutional design, conducting a comprehensive analysis spanning four independent papers. The papers move from targeted investigations of high-profile multilateral negotiations over AI regulation (Papers 1 and 2), to an examination of the forms of global AI governance (Papers 3 and 4). The negotiations in Paper 1 and 2 were selected deliberately to represent core issue domains in AI governance, security, and economic dimensions respectively. While papers are not strictly confined to a single analytical factor, their ordering reflects the sequential logic of the governance process from preferences through bargaining dynamics to institutional design.

Paper 1 focuses on the principal forum for negotiating global rules on lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS), the Group on Governmental Experts (GGE) under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) in Geneva. It aims to describe and explain state preferences on core issues of contestation and considers how the positioning of these preferences affects bargaining dynamics. Paper 2 turns to the negotiations of the EU AI Act, one of the world's first binding AI laws. It examines state influence over AI regulation, focusing on the role of AI competitiveness as a key determinant for whether or not states achieve outcomes in line with their preferences when bargaining. Paper 3 describes and explains the

emerging regime complex for AI, offering three distinct logics to help explain core features of the AI regime complex. Paper 4 examines legal and technical precision in global AI governance—understood as the degree to which AI policies employ exact rather than vague legal or technical language—thereby introducing a novel conceptualization of precision as a relevant dimension of AI policy.

## Definitions and Terminology

Throughout this dissertation, I draw on key concepts and terminology that require clarification at the outset. These fall into three sets: terminology pertaining to AI; a definition of global governance; and, finally, distinctions between central features of global AI governance.

What is meant by *AI*? Defining AI has proven notoriously difficult, resulting in a multitude of definitions, often dependent on the purposes and respective audiences involved (e.g., Russell and Norvig, 2021). As Maas (2025) observes, these definitions may, for example, focus on techniques, capabilities, applications, or societal impacts as relevant objects of interest.<sup>5</sup> As a case in point, even AI experts—a heterogeneous group ranging from computer scientists to human rights activists—differ widely in how they define and conceptualize AI, ultimately shaping their assessment of what the rules for AI should entail (Schopmans, 2026). Even authoritative definitions of AI are subject to change, as illustrated in the revisions proposed by the EU’s High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence (High-Level Expert Group on AI, 2019). For the purpose of this dissertation, I adopt a deliberately broad definition of AI, following the seminal definition by Russell and Norvig (2021), and understand it as computational systems capable of performing tasks that would typically require human intelligence.<sup>6</sup> This broad definition captures a wide range of technologies

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<sup>5</sup>For a comprehensive overview of broader “analogies” and “frames” for AI, see Maas (2023) and for useful discussions on challenges associated with defining AI, particularly from a governance perspective, see e.g., Maas (2025, pp. 3–4) or Bütthe et al. (2022, pp. 1722–1723).

<sup>6</sup>This definition of AI is consistent with that used in comparable works in the global AI governance literature, such as Furendal and Lundgren (2026). A more technical—but less adaptable and therefore

and technical approaches, including prominent applications, such as machine learning (ML), foundation models, or Generative AI (Maas, 2025). It is reasonably adaptable, including both narrow and task-specific AI applications, while also understanding AI as a general purpose technology (Crafts, 2021). Throughout the dissertation, the term *AI systems* refers to the full range of technologies this definition encompasses, from individual AI models to broader AI infrastructures.

I use the term *global governance* to refer to regulatory processes beyond the boundaries of nation-states, whether at the global or regional levels of governance (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004; Rosenau, 1999; Tallberg et al., 2018; Weiss and Wilkinson, 2014; Zürn, 2018). Conceptualizations of global governance tend to share an understanding that governance is broader than government, that regulatory processes involve diverse actors, and that the resulting rules may be binding or voluntary (Rosenau and Czempiel, 1992; Rosenau, 1995; Tallberg et al., 2018). Governance encompasses not only the making and enforcement of rules, but a wider range of functions including agenda-setting, implementation, and monitoring (Avant et al., 2010).

Accordingly, *global AI governance* refers to regulatory processes beyond the boundaries of nation-states, at global and regional levels of governance, with the purpose of shaping the development and deployment of AI. In line with a growing field of research, the focus of this dissertation is, broadly speaking, on the political responses to AI development and deployment (Furendal and Lundgren, 2026).<sup>7</sup>

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narrower—definition is offered by Büthe et al. (2022, p. 1723) who “understand AI as systems that combine means of gathering inputs from the external environment with technologies for processing these inputs and relating them algorithmically to previously stored data, allowing such systems to carry out a wide variety of tasks with some degree of autonomy, i.e., without simultaneous, ongoing human intervention. Their capacity for learning allows AI systems to solve problems and thus support, emulate or even improve upon human decision-making though (at least at this point of technological development) not holistically but only with regard to well-specified, albeit possibly quite complex tasks.”

<sup>7</sup>Other relevant definitions of global AI governance include, for example, Furendal and Lundgren (2026, p. 2) that define global AI governance as “the evolving constellation of efforts to shape the development, deployment, and consequences of AI through cross-border cooperation and regulation”, or Roberts et al. (2024, p. 1) who understand it as “the process through which diverse interests that transcend borders are accommodated, without a single sovereign authority, so that cooperative action may be taken in maximizing

To shed light on these regulatory processes, this dissertation focuses on actor preferences, bargaining dynamics, and institutional design. Therefore, additional terms require clarification. *Actor preferences* are understood as the ordered set of outcomes that a given actor seeks to achieve in the AI policy domain (Frieden, 1999). *Bargaining dynamics* refer to strategic interactions through which actors—with potentially divergent preferences—negotiate AI regulation. *Institutional design* refers to the forms of global AI governance institutions and the dimensions of variation (Koremenos et al., 2001).

I define *institutions* as “sets of rules meant to govern international behavior” (Martin and Simmons, 2013, p. 328) on AI development and deployment. Typically, institutions vary in terms of their legal form (e.g., hard versus soft law), organizational form (e.g., formal versus informal), geographical scope (e.g., global versus regional), authority (e.g., delegated, expert, and market), function (e.g., executive, legislative, and judicial) and scope (general purpose versus issue specific).<sup>8</sup>

Two clarifications are in order, as the dissertation purposefully diverges from this definition of institutions in two instances. For one, Paper 2 uses the term *EU institutions* to refer to the formal bodies of the EU, in line with established scholarship on EU negotiations. Furthermore, Paper 3 refers to *governance arrangements*, emphasizing the structural dimensions and relationships within the global AI regime complex, in line with conventions of the regime complex literature (e.g., Biermann et al., 2009; Henning and Pratt, 2023).

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the benefits and mitigating the risks of AI”. The definition proposed in this dissertation is deliberately broader, so as to avoid making a judgment that relevant regulatory processes necessarily maximize benefits over risks—a condition treated instead to assess effectiveness. For an in-depth discussion on the conceptual boundaries of what global AI governance may constitute, see Tallberg (2026); for a discussion of what AI governance as a field of study entails, see Dafoe (2018).

<sup>8</sup>The definition of institutions is adopted deliberately, to ground this dissertation’s analytical framework in established global governance terminology. Maas (2025), for example, uses the term “governance levers” to refer to tools or interventions deployed to shape AI development and manage its global impacts.

## Contribution

While Farrell contends that “political scientists are belatedly catching up with public debates about AI” (Farrell, 2025, p. 376), others point to a substantial and growing body of work that addresses topics directly relevant to AI governance (Maas, 2025). This dissertation expands beyond existing research on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Substantively, it provides a first comprehensive and systematic analysis of patterns and drivers of global AI governance by describing and explaining actor preferences, the bargaining dynamics among relevant actors, and the institutional outcomes that ensue.

Theoretically, this dissertation develops novel arguments about the global governance of AI across four papers. Its theoretical contribution is twofold. First, drawing on rational-choice institutionalist theory, the dissertation as a whole offers a more coherent theoretical account of the stepwise governance process than much prior scholarship.

Second, each of the dissertation’s papers develops novel theoretical arguments and testable hypotheses. The arguments theorize state preferences and bargaining dynamics among powerful states and small-state coalitions over LAWS regulation; identify AI competitiveness as a determinant of regulatory preferences, bargaining influence, and success in negotiations over AI regulation in the EU; unpack the patterns and drivers of the emerging AI regime complex; and develop legal and technical precision as key dimensions of AI policies. In doing so, the dissertation’s papers go beyond existing analyses, which have tended to focus narrowly on selected AI systems, issue domains, actors, or delimited negotiation contexts, and have largely favored descriptive accounts of governance outcomes over systematic explanations of their drivers.

Empirically, this dissertation spearheads a comprehensive analysis of the patterns and drivers of global AI governance that yields significant insights into each of the three dimensions of interest. The empirical contribution is twofold. First, all theoretical arguments advanced in this dissertation are subject to empirical testing on novel data. By contrast, even

comprehensive and conceptually rich accounts, such as Maas' (2025) analysis of global AI governance, have yet to be subjected to systematic empirical testing.

Second, each of the four papers engages in the collection of new, large-scale data, therefore providing a rich empirical foundation that spans key actors, negotiation contexts, and a longer temporal scope than most existing research. These data not only enable reliable inferences about global AI governance, but also constitute a substantial empirical resource for the broader research community.

## **Findings and Implications**

The dissertation's key findings are twofold.

First, on the descriptive research question, the dissertation finds that global AI governance is characterized by three core patterns: heterogeneity in terms of the actors shaping AI regulation, fragmentation of governance efforts across existing and novel institutions, and predominance of non-binding rules. To begin with, AI regulation is shaped by a range of actors beyond the state—with non-state actors, including private firms and civil society organizations, playing influential roles. Next, global AI governance is characterized by considerable fragmentation, with existing and newly created institutions overlapping in both membership and functional mandates, yielding dispersion rather than coordination. Finally, despite a proliferation of AI rules at the global level, most rules are non-binding—with rare exceptions of regionally binding landmark agreements, such as the EU AI Act.

Second, the findings of each paper point to two common explanatory factors. For one, interests regarding what AI governance should entail are far from unified, with preferences remaining considerably dispersed across actors. In Papers 1 and 2, albeit focused on state actors exclusively, actors with divergent security and economic interests drive bargaining dynamics in the LAWS and EU AI Act negotiations respectively; Papers 3 and 4 demonstrate that diverse actor constellations drive institutional fragmentation and considerable variation in

the core objectives of AI governance. Furthermore, broader uncertainty about AI shapes global AI governance patterns, as actors navigate the trade-off between reaping cooperative gains and securing competitive advantage over a strategically significant technology. This uncertainty is evident in the LAWS negotiations and is captured by the notion of AI competitiveness in the EU AI Act negotiations; more broadly, it helps explain both the fragmentation of global AI governance and actors' tendency to opt for flexible and largely non-binding rules on AI.

These findings carry several broader implications. First, actor heterogeneity, institutional fragmentation, and the prevalence of non-binding AI rules, suggest that global AI governance is unlikely to centralize and converge toward a focal organization in the near term. Rather, contestation among various actors with divergent regulatory preferences is likely to persist. The extraordinary pace of AI development and deployment paralyzes institutional adaptation, further accelerating the fragmentation of the existing international order—with authority over AI infrastructure emerging as a central axis of contestation (Farrell and Newman, 2019; Weymouth, 2025). This raises important questions about the conditions under which effective global AI governance can be achieved (e.g., Cihon et al., 2020; Roberts et al., 2024).<sup>9</sup>

Second, the findings carry implications for which theoretical approaches may be best suited to analyze patterns and drivers in global AI governance. This includes the need for rigorous, positivist research into what constitutes effective AI governance, given that the diversity of challenges posed by AI—as well as the current state of AI regulation—are unlikely to be met by a one-size-fits-all approach (e.g., Bremmer and Suleyman, 2023; Ingersleben-Seip and Mügge, 2026). Purely power-oriented and state-centric theoretical frameworks, for example, are unlikely to yield adequate insights in that regard, given ample evidence of a shift in authority from the level of states toward private actors.

Third, the findings raise implications when comparing AI with other issue areas. In some

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<sup>9</sup>Effectiveness is understood as the ability of rules to help solve or mitigate the problems that motivated rule-making (Miles et al., 2001; Young, 2011). In the context of AI, this typically refers to maximizing benefits while limiting negative consequences—directing attention to the benefits and costs of governance choices (e.g., Radu, 2021; Tallberg, 2026).

respects, AI governance shares familiar features of global governance—such as fragmentation and diverse actor constellations—yet is nevertheless distinctive in many other respects, including the degree of uncertainty, the pace of development, and the extent of industry authority. Even compared to other technologies, AI stands apart in this regard: “No technology this powerful has become so accessible, so widely, so quickly” (Bremmer and Suleyman, 2023, p. 6). Global climate change governance, for example, while addressing a similarly transnational—and urgent—issue, differs in that its pace of change and the distribution of relevant expertise and authority follow different logics—therefore underscoring that AI governance is a distinctive challenge for global governance and students of global governance.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

The four papers of this dissertation jointly offer a window into the politics of global AI governance. Yet, despite its scope, several limitations warrant acknowledgment. At the general level, while rational-choice institutionalism provides a coherent theoretical foundation—one that links preferences, bargaining dynamics, and institutional design into a unified framework—other theoretical approaches may well offer complementary insights. This is already suggested by Paper 3, which advances several alternative theoretical logics to help explain the patterns and drivers of global AI governance.

Beyond this, each paper carries its own limitations. While Papers 1 and 2 deliberately focus on negotiations in the security and economic issue domains, their findings may not travel straightforwardly to other issue domains and international settings. Paper 3 underscores how low levels of hierarchy and of functional differentiation in the AI regime complex are likely detrimental to addressing transnational problems effectively. That said, scholars argue that more selective cooperative efforts—rather than global ones—may prove equally, if not more, effective in addressing some of the governance challenges raised by AI (Ingersleben-Seip and Mügge, 2026). More differentiated accounts of governance challenges—and their implications

for effective governance—remain an important task for future research. Relatedly, Paper 4 advances precision as a useful indicator for assessing policies and their effectiveness, but additional dimensions of assessment are likely to matter and warrant further investigation.

Two avenues for future research appear especially pressing in light of the dissertation’s findings. Paper 3 documents the fragmentation of global AI governance, and prior research on national AI policies points to considerable cross-country variation (e.g., Djeflal et al., 2022). Yet, national and global AI regulation have largely been studied in isolation from one another (for exceptions, see, e.g., Ema et al., 2026; Radu, 2026), despite strong prior evidence from the literature on domestic politics and globalization that the two levels are extensively interlinked and mutually shape each other (e.g., Putnam, 1988; Milner, 1997). Furthermore, Paper 4 points to the outsized role of Big Tech corporations in shaping global AI governance, a finding consistent with a growing body of research on corporate influence in the AI domain (e.g., Weymouth, 2025; Srivastava, 2023; Tan and Thelen, 2025). Future work should systematically examine the ways in which these actors exert authority in AI governance—and, in particular, how the distribution of power between states and industry is evolving as AI further matures.

## **State of the Art**

The politics of technological change is by no means a novel research endeavor. Technological change often has significant cross-national implications, shaping the dynamics of cooperation and conflict among states and other actors (e.g., Farrell and Newman, 2019; Krasner, 1991). Situating AI within this broader pattern, this dissertation contributes to three larger bodies of literature. Together, they can be thought of as a reversed funnel, ranging from domain-specific literature on AI governance at the narrow end to broadly applicable theoretical frameworks offered by global governance literature at the wide end. The first body of literature is the rapidly growing scholarship on AI governance. This field is interdisciplinary in nature

and focuses on examining the effects of AI, the actors shaping how to govern it, and the conditions for effective governance outcomes. The second body of work is global digital governance scholarship. This literature examines, for example, how digital technology—which encompasses AI but extends well beyond it—is governed. Finally, the dissertation draws on general global governance scholarship, which offers, for example, widely tested theoretical mechanisms to help explain cooperation, authority, and effectiveness in policymaking beyond the nation-state. For each body of literature, this section offers a summary and identifies its limitations, before delineating how the dissertation addresses those gaps.

## **Literature 1: AI Governance**

Scholarship on AI governance is broad and interdisciplinary, spanning economics, law, philosophy, or political science. Comprehensive overviews from a social science perspective are offered by Büthe et al. (2022), Dafoe (2018), and Taeihagh (2021).

To begin with, the notion of AI governance reflects expectations about AI's impacts that constitute governance challenges and therefore require governing (for an overview, see, e.g., Nitzberg and Zysman, 2022). A significant strand of scholarship examines the effects of AI that give rise to this demand. This includes work examining AI's implications on employment (e.g., Acemoglu and Restrepo, 2018; Korinek and Stiglitz, 2019; McAfee and Brynjolfsson, 2016), climate change (e.g., Cowls et al., 2021), and military strategy (e.g., Horowitz, 2018; Payne, 2018). Scholars have focused on the effects of specific AI systems or application areas, including algorithmic decision-making, facial recognition technology, smart law enforcement, autonomous vehicles, and deepfakes (e.g., D. Almeida et al., 2021; Bonnefon et al., 2016; Chesney and Citron, 2019; Hong et al., 2022; Lepri et al., 2018; Raaijmakers, 2019). Another strand of work has examined the ethical implications of AI from a variety of angles (e.g., Dafoe, 2018; Erman and Furendal, 2022; Hagendorff, 2020), surveyed global ethics policies (e.g., Jobin et al., 2019; D. S. Schiff et al., 2022), and explored AI's implications for human

rights (e.g., Donahoe and Metzger, 2019; P.-H. Wong, 2020; W. H. Wong, 2023).

Because AI poses both opportunities and risks, policymakers must balance potential benefits against harms when deciding how to govern it. One strand of research therefore examines what desirable—and effective—AI governance may look like (e.g., Cihon et al., 2020; Dafoe, 2018; Gasser and V. A. Almeida, 2017; Jelinek et al., 2021; Marchant and Wallach, 2015). Some contributions draw on historical analogies—such as the governance of nuclear weapons—to derive lessons for AI (e.g., Hatz, 2026; Maas, 2019; Zaidi and Dafoe, 2021), while others identify the shortcomings of prevailing governance efforts to underscore obstacles toward effective governance (e.g., Mittelstadt, 2019).

Furthermore, considerable prior work studies the actors involved in shaping AI governance. State actors, and national-level AI regulation in particular, have attracted scholarly attention (e.g., Djeflal et al., 2022; D. S. Schiff, 2023; D. S. Schiff and K. J. Schiff, 2023). This includes in-depth case studies of AI governance in selected countries, in particular, the United States and China (e.g., Allen, 2019; Allison and Schmidt, 2020; Bryson and Malikova, 2021; Ding, 2018; Hine and Floridi, 2022; Rasser et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2021b; Zeng, 2020; Zeng, 2021), and to a lesser extent, the EU (e.g., Ulnicane, 2022) or other countries (e.g., Attard-Frost et al., 2024). A number of studies examine national AI regulation comparatively (e.g., Cath, 2018; Radu, 2021; Roberts et al., 2021a; Roberts et al., 2022). The public constitutes another relevant stakeholder in AI governance, as it occupies a dual role as users and those bearing its societal consequences. This is reflected in an uptake of public opinion research on citizens’ attitudes toward AI and its regulation. Citizens’ preferences toward AI more generally, and its regulation specifically, have been studied in various contexts, including the US (Zhang and Dafoe, 2019) and Germany (König et al., 2023). Ehret (2022) offers a comparative assessment of citizen preferences in five countries: Chile, China, Germany, India, and the UK. Others have measured public opinion toward specific AI applications, such as AI weaponry (Horowitz, 2016; Rosendorf et al., 2023), or elite attitudes on AI regulation (Li

et al., 2025). Corporate actors, in particular, constitute a relevant actor type, with several studies emphasizing the interests and role of private corporations in shaping AI governance (e.g., Chapman, 2026; Cihon et al., 2021; Auld et al., 2022; Tallberg et al., 2024; Srivastava, 2023).

Given AI's transnational development, deployment, and externalities, a rising number of AI governance initiatives are global in scope. This has given rise to a dedicated strand of literature on global AI governance (e.g., Maas, 2025; Tallberg et al., 2023; Veale et al., 2023). Early work has offered descriptive mappings of global AI governance (Butcher and Beridze, 2019; Schmitt, 2021), or discussed key obstacles and pathways to achieving effective global AI governance (Roberts et al., 2024).

Yet, taken together, the AI governance literature remains limited in several respects. Much existing research—and on the global level specifically—is descriptive and exploratory, or focused on selected technologies and negotiation contexts. Even comprehensive studies of global AI governance (e.g., Maas, 2025), have yet to be complemented by systematic empirical testing. Furthermore, contributions on AI ideal governance may shed light on what different proposals and trajectories could look like, but fall short in their ability to help explain the preferences and bargaining dynamics that shape actual policy development. Finally, findings from scholarship on national-level AI governance do not necessarily travel to the global level, which involves distinct governance problems and actor constellations.

## **Literature 2: Global Digital Governance**

Moving beyond the AI-specific literature, AI is one instance of, and builds upon, a broader class of digital technologies—ranging from hardware and software to cloud computing and big data. This makes global digital governance literature directly relevant to the study of global AI governance, including prior work on internet governance (e.g., DeNardis, 2020; DeNardis, 2014; Mueller, 2010; Radu, 2019), on the political and economic implications posed by digital

technologies (e.g., Zysman and Newman, 2006), and on concerns such as privacy and human rights (e.g., D’Agostino and Durante, 2018; Newman and Bach, 2004; W. H. Wong, 2023; Zuboff, 2019).

Like other transnational policy issues, digital technologies generate conflicts of interest among states and other relevant actors. Research on digital governance has produced insights into how states approach the regulation of digital technologies, including the role of state power in shaping regulation (Drezner, 2004) and competing regulatory models leading to digital spheres of influence (e.g., Beaumier and Gjesvik, 2025; Bradford, 2020; Bradford, 2023). Farrell and Newman (2019), for example, have coined the concept of weaponized interdependence to capture ways in which states can exploit their positions in economic and technological networks to exert power over others—a dynamic particularly salient in the digital domain. The rise of powerful digital technology companies has not only intensified research on the distribution of power and competitive dynamics between states, but also specifically between states and private actors, raising the issue of digital sovereignty—the extent to which states exert meaningful authority over their digital infrastructure—prompting a dedicated strand of research on this issue (e.g., Adler-Nissen and Eggeling, 2024; Floridi, 2020; Flonk et al., 2024).

Both the digital technology domain and AI involve many of the same actors exerting influence over the rules that emerge. This extends to powerful state actors, as well as leading AI firms that have their roots in major digital corporations, which have attracted the focus of earlier scholarship (e.g., Culpepper and Thelen, 2020; Gorwa et al., 2024; Kalyanpur and Newman, 2019; Newman, 2010). The EU has received particular attention in the scholarly debate, given its emergence as a leading regulatory force in the digital sphere, with the ability to shape global digital standards (e.g., Bradford, 2020; Hoeffler and Mérand, 2023). Other work has focused specifically on the tripartite competition among the world’s three dominant digital powers—the United States, China, and the EU—examining their divergent regulatory

approaches and power dynamics among them (Beaumier and Gjesvik, 2025; Bradford, 2023).

Nevertheless, while research on global digital governance yields valuable insights into common governance challenges, conflicts of interest, and comparable actor constellations, AI is not simply another digital technology. AI's scope as a general purpose technology is considerably broader—affecting virtually all aspects of human life. Furthermore, power in the AI domain has shifted further toward private corporations, most evident in the infrastructural power of major tech firms, which increasingly challenges state authority (Weymouth, 2025). This suggests that AI governance displays distinct patterns, driven by domain-specific factors.

### **Literature 3: Global Governance**

At the most foundational level, this dissertation contributes to scholarship on global governance. Efforts to govern AI do not emerge in a vacuum; instead, they are embedded within broader global governance frameworks. AI as a policy domain overlaps with other global governance policy domains, including global economic affairs, international security, or—as previously discussed—global digital technology. Furthermore, both existing institutions and novel institutions address AI governance at the global level. Global governance scholarship offers well-tested theoretical mechanisms that can illuminate the patterns and drivers of efforts to govern AI internationally. This includes prior research on actor preferences (e.g., Frieden, 1999; Frieden and Walter, 2019; Moravcsik, 1993; Moravcsik, 1997), bargaining dynamics (e.g., Fearon, 1998; Goodin, 1998), and institutional design (e.g., Koremenos et al., 2001; Rosendorff and Milner, 2001).

Beyond the importance for this dissertation's theoretical framework, global governance scholarship provides the foundations for understanding when and why actors cooperate in managing transnational problems. States, for example, typically turn to international institutions to achieve mutual gains, as they reduce transaction costs or help to manage information asymmetries (e.g., Keohane, 1984; Martin, 1992). Other relevant strands of

research include the myriad different forms of authority in global governance, including the central role of state authority in shaping governance (e.g., Krasner, 1983; Waltz, 1979), research on shared authority relations in global governance (e.g., Abbott and Faude, 2021; Andonova, 2017), as well as private authority, showing how various types of non-state actors increasingly exercise governance functions (e.g., Cutler et al., 1999; Hall and Biersteker, 2002). Finally, scholarship on legitimacy and effectiveness provides critical insights into whether global governance is both capable of solving transnational policy problems, while also meeting standards about appropriate governance (e.g., Biermann et al., 2009; Tallberg et al., 2018; Tallberg and Zürn, 2019; Zürn, 2018).

Yet, as global AI governance rapidly proliferates and gains traction, core assumptions from scholarship on global governance require careful assessment in the case of AI. To begin with, the cooperation literature highlights the pursuit of coordination for joint gains, but AI complicates this logic. On the one hand, AI promises substantial economic gains (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2014); on the other hand, it simultaneously generates strategic competition, as states and firms race to achieve technological superiority (Dafoe, 2018; Horowitz, 2018). Unlike existing policy issues in global governance, it remains deeply contested how actors weigh between cooperative gains versus competition, and to what extent these logics can be reconciled. Next, authority in global AI governance distinguishes itself from previous accounts of authority in global governance. Prior technologies, for example, were mainly developed by states and their militaries, making state-centric authority a natural fit. AI development, by contrast, is concentrated in a small number of private firms, raising fundamental questions about a reshaping of authority relations. Finally, prior scholarship has shown that institutional proliferation—as currently underway in the AI domain—does not guarantee effectiveness, with governance gaps persisting even in densely institutionalized domains (e.g., Alter and Meunier, 2009; Biermann et al., 2009; Drezner, 2009; Keohane and Victor, 2011). This tension is especially relevant for AI governance, where existing international institutions may need to

adapt or expand well beyond their original mandates (e.g., Weymouth, 2025), yet it remains uncertain which institutions are best positioned to address the multifaceted challenges of AI in the first place.

## **Limitations in Existing Research**

Taken together, the previous section reveals several gaps in research on AI governance, digital governance, and global governance. First, AI governance literature remains largely descriptive and exploratory, stopping short of systematic explanations of the patterns and drivers of global AI governance. Second, theories of digital governance and global governance offer useful frameworks for explaining aspects of global AI governance, but their explanatory power has yet to be systematically tested—and may require revision—when applied to the AI domain. AI differs from other digital technologies in its general-purpose capabilities and in a concentration of expertise and power among a small number of private firms that is more pronounced than in any prior digital technology, leaving states increasingly dependent on the very actors they may seek to regulate. Furthermore, theories of global governance—including accounts on cooperation, authority, and effectiveness—require systematic testing in the AI context, where the influential role of private actors and uncertainty over AI’s capabilities may challenge existing theoretical accounts.

This dissertation advances our understanding of global AI governance in relation to each of these gaps. First, each paper combines both descriptive and explanatory elements, therefore advancing systematic analyses that the field—and the literature on AI governance in particular—has so far lacked. Second, the papers focus on three elements—actor preferences, bargaining dynamics, and institutional design—applied across negotiation contexts and considering varying relevant actors. This approach not only ensures comparability, but provides an analytical framework that allows evaluation—and potential reassessment—of prior expectations from the literature on global digital governance and global governance.

# Theorizing the Global Governance of AI: Actor Preferences, Bargaining Dynamics, and Institutional Design

This dissertation develops novel theoretical arguments about the patterns and drivers of global AI governance by investigating three interconnected aspects of the governance process: actor preferences, bargaining dynamics, and institutional design. Studying preferences can provide insight into actors' underlying interests and reveal the extent to which they may converge or diverge across actor constellations. Examining bargaining dynamics emphasizes the processes through which preferences are translated into outcomes. Analyzing institutional design offers insights into the forms of global AI governance, the factors that shape design choices, and their consequences for governance outcomes.

Each of these three steps provides insights that are both theoretically and empirically relevant to understanding the patterns and drivers of global AI governance. Importantly, the value of the framework lies not only in what each step reveals individually, but in the sequential logic that connects them. In the first step, this approach allows for a systematic assessment of the political and economic interests that underpin actors' preferences. In the second step, the framework focuses on bargaining dynamics, where divergent preferences are either reconciled or not. In the third step, the framework examines institutional design choices, such as whether new institutions are created or existing ones amended.

To advance this theoretical framework, the dissertation draws on theories of preference formation, interstate bargaining, and institutional design, developing testable hypotheses across the four papers. While each paper develops distinct hypotheses drawing on a range of theoretical approaches—for example from debates on global governance and political economy—the overarching theoretical framework is anchored within rational choice institutionalism (e.g., Koremenos et al., 2001) and liberal theories of international relations (e.g., Moravcsik, 1997). Rational-choice institutionalist approaches typically either emphasize functional demands

as drivers of cooperation (Keohane, 1984; Martin, 1992) or the role of preferences and institutional rules as determinants of bargaining and its subsequent outcomes (e.g., Lundgren et al., 2019; Moravcsik, 1998). According to the first perspective, states choose to cooperate when the expected gains from joint action—managing externalities or reducing uncertainty—outweigh the costs of doing so (Keohane, 1984). In the AI domain, functional demand for cooperation may stem from AI generating transnational externalities and the high degree of uncertainty surrounding its risks and future capabilities (Tallberg, 2026). The second perspective emphasizes that bargaining outcomes result from strategic interactions among goal-oriented actors with divergent preferences, operating under institutional constraints (Shepsle, 2006). In the AI domain, this perspective directs attention to the distribution of state preferences along dimensions of conflict of relevance in the AI domain, such as the tension between innovation and safety or national and global approaches to AI regulation (Tallberg, 2026).

The rational-choice institutionalist approach pursued here allows to situate the four papers within a consistent logic. Alternative theories would offer varying entry points into the politics of global AI governance. Power-oriented approaches, for example, direct attention to the role of power—and in particular, powerful states—in determining regulatory outcomes. In this dissertation, Papers 1 and 3 implicitly draw on insights from such approaches. At the same time, theories focused on state power singularly risk understating the roles of less powerful actors, or the substantial power of private firms in the AI domain, which does not fit easily with state-centric conceptions of power. Norm-oriented scholarship, by contrast, emphasizes the wider ideational context in which institutions are embedded. Yet, the highly competitive environment within which AI regulation is currently pursued appears, as Tallberg (2026) notes, to be driven more by strategic interest than by shared normative commitments, therefore lending itself better to interest-based rather than norms-based drivers of governance outcomes.

Figure 1 visualizes the three-step analytical framework the dissertation builds upon.

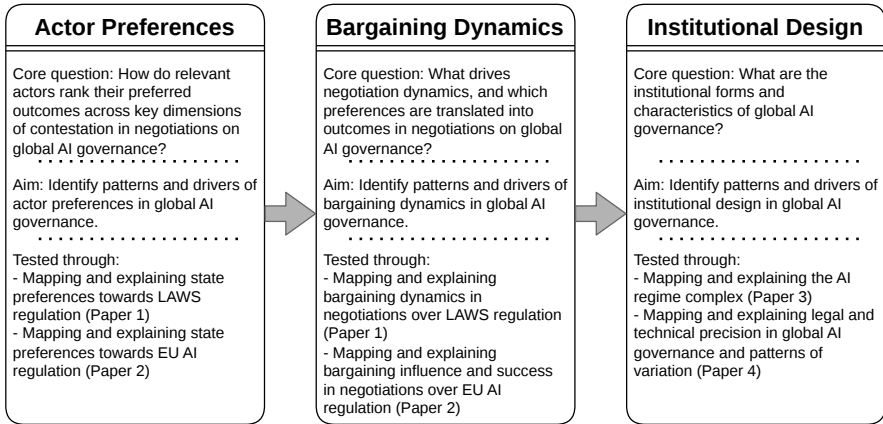


Figure 1: Framework for Analysis.

In the following section, I discuss each component of the overarching analytical framework in greater detail.

## Actor Preferences

In a first step, the analytical framework emphasizes the preferences of relevant actors involved in global AI governance, which remain poorly understood. Yet, studying these preferences can help to identify patterns of variation between actors and explain how state and non-state actors order possible outcomes on the dimensions of contestation in the AI domain, such as innovation versus safety. Accordingly, actors are expected to pursue preferences that reflect their economic or military interests and allow them to balance the benefits and risks of AI systems. State preferences, for example, are typically dependent on a myriad of factors, including domestic socio-economic or political factors, therefore leading states to balance differently between societal, ideological, and institutional considerations (Frieden and Walter, 2019; Moravcsik, 1997).

Paper 1 maps and explains state preferences toward LAWS regulation, considering the underlying reasons for why actors hold these preferences. Specifically, this paper develops an argument that great powers hold preferences that allow them to maintain—or even expand—their military advantage. This contrasts with the preferences of weaker states, which tend to favor clear and binding rules to protect themselves from the potential adverse impacts of LAWS. Paper 2 theorizes the determinants of state influence in the negotiations of the EU AI Act. To do this, the paper identifies the regulatory preferences of EU member states, ordering them on a continuum from promoting innovation to prioritizing safety. Finally, since Paper 1 examines preferences on sectoral AI regulation and Paper 2 on horizontal AI regulation, the two papers jointly allow for an assessment of whether regulatory scope—that is, whether regulation targets a specific AI application or AI more generally—systematically shapes preferences.

## **Bargaining Dynamics**

In a second step, the analytical framework focuses on the bargaining dynamics between actors. Drawing on established theories of interstate bargaining (e.g., Fearon, 1995; Fearon, 1998), actors engage in strategic interactions to pursue outcomes that best align with their interests and adopt strategies to secure their most preferred results (Frieden, 1999). Analyzing bargaining dynamics thus requires knowledge of the underlying distribution of preferences as a first step. Studying the bargaining dynamics between relevant actors in global AI governance enables a deeper understanding of the conflict dynamics, the strategies through which actors pursue their preferences, and the ways in which these dynamics ultimately result in governance outcomes. This is especially pertinent in the context of AI governance, given the pervasive uncertainty surrounding AI's capabilities and risks, and the highly asymmetric distribution of expertise between a handful of powerful states and big tech corporations on the one hand, and other actors on the other hand, which sets this domain apart from other policy areas.

Papers 1 and 2 theorize bargaining dynamics in negotiations over global AI governance, at both the global and regional levels of governance. Specifically, Paper 1 focuses on the negotiations of regulations for LAWS within the CCW in Geneva. It maps and explains the dynamic relationship between the positioning of great power preferences and coalition formation employed by weaker states, in the context of the CCW's unanimity decision rules. Paper 2 examines the negotiations over the EU AI Act, mapping and explaining bargaining influence and success, by considering how state preferences translated into negotiated outcomes.

## **Institutional Design**

In a third step, the analytical framework highlights the institutional design of global AI governance. Prior research on institutional design emphasizes that institutions can take diverse forms and that these design choices are not random, but rather the result of rational interactions between relevant actors (e.g., Koremenos et al., 2001; Rosendorff and Milner, 2001). Analyzing institutional design allows not only for mapping the diversity of regulatory arrangements that have emerged in global AI governance, but also generates insights into how variation in institutional design may shape the substantive effects of global AI governance. This includes, for example, potential differences between whether rules are binding or non-binding. While institutional design is frequently treated in the literature as an independent variable shaping governance outcomes, in this dissertation, it is mainly treated as a dependent variable, therefore directing attention to the drivers of institutional design.

Papers 3 and 4 theorize institutional design of global AI governance. Paper 3 builds on regime complex theory to provide a comprehensive mapping of current global AI governance arrangements. Specifically, it focuses on two structural features common to regime complexes—hierarchy and differentiation—and offers three distinct logics that help explain its shape. Paper 4 develops a novel theoretical argument about legal and technical precision as relevant dimensions of AI policy.

## Research Design and Methods

The dissertation's overarching research design is characterized by three core features. First, throughout its four papers, this dissertation relies on original data and spearheads multiple, large-N data collection efforts. Second, all of the papers share a general approach that combines both descriptive and explanatory aims. Third, each paper relies on methodological tools that best align with the empirical objectives and research aim of each paper. In sum, this approach underscores the empirical ambition of the dissertation: To offer a comprehensive analysis of global AI governance.

This dissertation's core empirical contribution lies in its collection of new, large-scale data for each of the singular papers. In order to draw reliable inferences about global AI governance more generally, it is critical to collect such large scale data. Yet, given the novelty of AI as a topic of interest in the literature and as a policy issue of concern in international settings, data coverage remains sparse. As a result, I opted to collect data over limited time periods and, in two of the papers, within delimited empirical contexts. While previous research in global AI governance, for example, has generated initial insights into states' preferences, studied selective bargaining contexts, and highlighted core features of AI institutions, these studies are typically limited in terms of their ability to reveal systematic patterns of variation across actors. To this end, Papers 1 and 2 focus on singular negotiation contexts, but generate insights for multiple states across time and space. Papers 3 and 4 shift the focus to broader institutional design features in global AI governance, thus including large-N data on AI institutions and policies, while also spanning across time and space.

Concretely, Paper 1 relies on a novel dataset on the positions of states over selected issues of contestation within the context of the negotiations over LAWS regulation. These data are based on publicly available, textual material from the CCW negotiations and cover the time period between 2017 and 2023. The data were sourced from the website of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and the corpus includes 247 documents that together

generate 1,256 unique positions by CCW state parties. Paper 2 introduces novel data on state influence on the negotiations of the EU AI Act. These data are built on comments submitted by EU member states and were sourced from the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU. From these data, it is possible to estimate EU member states' relative bargaining influence by comparing their initial policy positions with the corresponding negotiated outcome on four selected issues. Subsequently, the determinants of bargaining success are assessed through regression analyses, controlling for conventional correlates of state influence in EU negotiations. The data comprise 294 observations at the member-issue-comment level, across 21 member states. Paper 3 introduces a novel dataset that covers 119 institutions involved in international AI governance. The data cover the time period from 2014 to 2024. In line with the objectives of this paper, the data capture detailed information on both institutions and institutional bodies. The data are drawn from a variety of relevant sources, including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) AI Policy Observatory and data by the Council of Europe (CoE). To capture institutions of relevance, the data collection effort applied strict inclusion criteria, whereby institutions had to adopt at least one policy explicitly and substantively address AI governance. Paper 4 then focuses on AI policies as the level of analysis, combining data from a variety of data sources. In total, this newly compiled dataset, when restricted to documents with sufficient text content for analysis includes 176 observations.

Furthermore, throughout the dissertation, the empirical ambition of each paper integrates both descriptive and explanatory elements. This dual emphasis allows for a comprehensive mapping of the current state of global AI governance, while also offering key insights into the factors that shape its development, whether at the global and regional levels of governance (Papers 2 and 3), at the global level of governance (Paper 4), or within specific negotiation contexts (Papers 1 and 2). In emerging issue areas such as AI, systematic descriptive research is particularly valuable for several reasons. For one, descriptive research can help identify key

concepts of interest and uncover empirical patterns of interest that are subsequently used for theoretical reasoning and explanatory analysis. Furthermore, it facilitates the identification of relevant actors, behaviors, and broader trends, allowing researchers to detect previously unobserved patterns of variation and change over time. Explanatory research goes beyond documenting the occurrence of certain patterns, asking why they occur and how they may be explained. By integrating an explanatory aim into each paper, the dissertation moves beyond description to identify correlations between key variables, helping to account for the empirical patterns observed. This approach also tests whether established theoretical mechanisms from the study of multilateral bargaining (Paper 1), EU negotiations (Paper 2), and institutional design (Paper 3 and 4) hold or rather require refinement in the context of AI governance.

Finally, each paper uses a combination of different methodological approaches tailored to the research aim and its respective descriptive and explanatory ambition. Paper 1 relies on textual material to derive state preferences and map bargaining dynamics on LAWS regulation. The paper examines descriptive patterns in the data and complements this through quantitative text analysis, specifically, key-word-assisted topic modeling (key-ATM) (Eshima et al., 2024). This automated content analysis method proves to be particularly valuable for handling large-scale textual data, enabling a systematic exploration of the textual material. Paper 2 relies on textual material to compare states' initial positions against the negotiated outcome. Methodologically, it estimates a series of linear probability models (LPM) to test what predicts bargaining success. To account for unobserved heterogeneity in the data and for potential within-country correlation, models are estimated with fixed effects and clustered standard errors. Paper 3 uses novel data on global AI institutions to identify broad descriptive patterns in the emerging AI regime complex, while assessing the explanatory power of the three hypothesized logics through congruence analysis. Paper 4 utilizes a large-N approach, complementing a dictionary-based measure of legal and technical precision with regression analysis. Specifically, it estimates a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) and

LPM regressions, incorporating time-fixed effects and clustered standard errors.

## **Four Essays on the Global Governance of AI**

The dissertation comprises four individual papers, jointly addressing the two research questions. The next section provides a brief summary of each paper.

### **Paper 1: Lowest Common Denominator: Explaining Multilateral Bargaining Over Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems Regulation<sup>10</sup>**

This article *describes and explains state preferences and bargaining dynamics over global LAWS regulation*. It focuses on the principal forum discussing LAWS regulation—the Group on Governmental Experts under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons—in Geneva. AI-induced weaponry, and LAWS in particular, has the potential to dramatically alter modern warfare. If deployed, these weapons systems create transboundary externalities, raising the stakes for international cooperation. Despite a strong rationale for negotiating global rules, years of deliberation within the CCW have failed to produce a substantive agreement, resulting only in non-binding guiding principles that many regard as a lowest common denominator outcome. Prior research has extensively examined the normative issues posed by the development and deployment of LAWS, as well as public attitudes toward them. Furthermore, studies focusing specifically on the Geneva negotiations have typically focused on isolated issues of contestation, selected actors, or the determinants of states’ positions and their frequency of participation. This article moves beyond earlier scholarship by analyzing a broader set of contested issues and tracing the temporal evolution of the negotiations over LAWS regulation. Theoretically, it draws on rational choice institutionalism to map and

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<sup>10</sup>Geith, J. (2025). [Lowest Common Denominator: Explaining Multilateral Bargaining Over Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems Regulation](#). *Global Policy* 17:13–35.

explain how the interplay between great power preferences and coalition formation jointly impedes a preference convergence dynamic, which is typically expected under the given consensus-based decision rules. Empirically, the article introduces a novel dataset that records the preferences of all negotiating parties on nine contested issues between 2017 and 2023, and maps the bargaining dynamics using descriptive analysis and keyword-assisted topic modeling. Its findings are threefold. First, great powers are largely uniform in their opposition to new rules on LAWS, distinguishing them from most other states advocating for stricter rules, in particular as the negotiations advance over time. Second, weaker states turn to coalition formation as a strategy for augmenting their power. Third, the findings indicate that the interaction of these two factors significantly constrains a concession-convergence dynamic. As a part of the dissertation, Paper 1 offers an analysis of the patterns and drivers of global AI governance by zooming in on the security domain—an issue area where the need for transnational policy coordination is especially salient. Its central contribution lies in explaining the conflict between those states favoring minimal rule change and those pushing for new regulations. The CCW negotiations provide a valuable setting for this analysis, not only as one of the earliest international outlets to specifically target AI, but also as a setting where the bargaining dynamics play out exclusively among states.

## **Paper 2: Negotiating the EU AI Act: AI Competitiveness, State Preferences, and Bargaining Success<sup>11</sup>**

This co-authored paper *examines state influence* over AI regulation, focusing specifically on the negotiations over the European Union AI Act.<sup>12</sup> The AI Act represents the first major regulatory framework on AI and its adoption follows a lengthy negotiation process

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<sup>11</sup>Co-authored working paper.

<sup>12</sup>My co-authorship contribution is as follows: conceptualization (equal), data collection (lead), empirical analysis (lead), theory (equal), writing – original draft (lead), writing – review and editing (lead), organization (lead); overall the contribution exceeds 50%.

that saw periods of intense contestation, the addition of thousands of amendments, and time pressure to reach an agreement. As states differ in their technological capabilities, the question arises whether, and to what extent, these differences translate into bargaining influence. Theoretically, this paper develops two competing expectations on the importance of AI competitiveness for state influence over the EU AI Act. On the one hand, a first perspective suggests that states with more competitive AI sectors should exert greater influence, as they possess superior resources that can be leveraged in negotiations. On the other hand, a second perspective suggests that highly competitive states have stronger stakes in achieving harmonized EU rules, therefore making them more dependent on reaching an agreement and lessening their ability to influence the negotiations. Empirically, the paper draws on an original dataset to conduct a preference attainment analysis, measuring states' relative bargaining influence through regression analysis. The paper's core finding is that AI competitiveness attenuated states' influence over the contents of the AI Act, undermining bargaining success. Paper 2 analyzes the patterns and drivers of global AI governance by closely examining state influence in the negotiations over the EU AI Act—one of the earliest binding AI regulations and an entirely novel regulatory framework rather than an adaptation of existing rules.

### **Paper 3: The Emerging Regime Complex for Artificial Intelligence<sup>13</sup>**

This co-authored article *describes and explains the emerging regime complex for AI*.<sup>14</sup> The promises and pitfalls of AI have led to an intense race to find appropriate rules for how to best govern AI. Yet, so far, there is no central institution tasked with coordinating AI governance at the international level; rather, the regulatory landscape is characterized by a variety of nascent and partially overlapping governance arrangements. While prior research

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<sup>13</sup>**Geith, J., Lundgren, M. & Tallberg, J.** (2026). The Emerging Regime Complex for Artificial Intelligence. Forthcoming in *Global Studies Quarterly*.

<sup>14</sup>My co-authorship contribution is as follows: conceptualization (equal), data collection (lead), empirical analysis (lead), theory (equal), writing – original draft (lead), writing – review and editing (equal), organization (lead); overall the contribution exceeds 50%.

has suggested that AI governance efforts share resemblance with a nascent regime complex and provided descriptive evidence that underscores the fragmentation of global AI governance, systematic and comprehensive analyses of such a regime complex across time and space are still absent. This article provides the first systematic effort to trace the emergence and evolution of the AI regime complex, 2014–2024, while also offering an explanatory account of the forces driving this development. To this end, it builds on prior work from comparative regime complex analysis and identifies two dimensions of interest to describe and explain the AI regime complex: hierarchy and differentiation. Subsequently, this article develops three explanatory logics that may help explain its shape, namely, a power-oriented, functionalist, and path-dependent logic. The power-oriented logic highlights the influence of great power preferences; the functionalist logic highlights the nature of the cooperation problems; the path-dependent logic highlights the role of existing institutional legacies. Empirically, the article utilizes descriptive and congruence analyses to assess the explanatory power of the three theorized logics, drawing on a novel dataset. The dataset provides a comprehensive inventory of international institutions constituting AI governance. The findings underscore that the AI regime complex is characterized by a low degree of hierarchy, a dense geographic concentration of governance efforts in Europe, and low differentiation in terms of institutions' functional domains. The article further demonstrates that the emergence and structure of the AI regime complex are jointly influenced by state power, functional demands, and institutional path dependencies. Paper 3 addresses the dissertation's descriptive research question, providing a comprehensive mapping of global AI governance efforts. Beyond its descriptive contribution, Paper 3 also complements the dissertation by focusing beyond states as relevant actors shaping AI governance. Furthermore, it expands the theoretical lens beyond rational-choice institutionalism to consider other complementary explanatory approaches.

## Paper 4: “Common Sense Rules”: Legal and Technical Precision in Global AI Governance<sup>15</sup>

This paper *maps and explains legal and technical precision in global AI governance* and emphasizes patterns of variation between relevant actors. The fragmentation and perceived inadequacy of existing global AI governance efforts raise important questions about how to achieve effective AI governance and in what ways relevant actors diverge in what objectives they prioritize when drafting AI rules. Yet, these questions remain poorly understood. To that end, this paper advances an argument about the utility of precision as a relevant dimension of AI policy.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, the paper develops a novel distinction between legal and technical precision to gauge differences between different actor types. The paper develops expectations for three relevant actor types, namely public, public-private, and private actors. Empirically, it builds on a newly collected dataset on AI policies, combining data from a variety of sources. These data allow for a large-N approach, using a dictionary approach and regression analysis for descriptive and explanatory analysis. Two main findings stand out. First, legal and technical precision are relevant and empirically separable dimensions of interest in AI policy documents. Second, actor type correctly predicts differences in technical precision, yet the results for legal precision challenge the stated expectations. Paper 4 addresses the dissertation’s descriptive and explanatory research question by zooming in on precision as a relevant dimension of interest in gauging AI governance. It complements the preceding papers in several ways. Papers 1 and 2 document that state actors alone exhibit considerable preference divergence—suggesting that the inclusion of non-state actors is likely to reveal even greater variation in interests. Finally, Paper 4 departs from the observation that most

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<sup>15</sup>Working paper.

<sup>16</sup>*Policies* are understood as a type of output through which actors pursue governance objectives. Policies are typically distinguished along several relevant dimensions, including type (regulations, declarations, or reports), instrument (binding or voluntary), and target (public or private actors) (e.g., Lundgren et al., 2024). The focus on policies is deliberate, reflecting the paper’s ambition to speak to the effectiveness of global AI governance, given that policy output is an established dimension of interest in research on the performance and effectiveness of international institutions (e.g., Tallberg et al., 2016).

rules on AI are non-binding, asking what additional patterns of variation can be observed, how they may be explained, and what this implies for governance effectiveness.

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## Sammanfattning på svenska

Artificiell intelligens (AI) utgör en av de mest betydelsefulla styrningsutmaningarna under det 21:a århundradet. Följaktligen betraktar en rad aktörer— däribland nationalstater, internationella organisationer och icke-statliga aktörer—AI som ett kritiskt område för strategisk konkurrens och riskreducering. Medan beslutsfattare runt om i världen brottas med frågan om huruvida och hur AI ska regleras, har uppmärksamheten på senare tid förskjutits mot den globala styrningsnivån. Ännu idag saknas fortfarande systematisk kunskap om mönstren och drivkrafterna bakom global AI-styrning. I syfte att råda bot på detta ger denna avhandling en systematisk analys av tre områden inom styrningsprocessen som har stor potential att fördjupa vår förståelse av den globala styrningen av AI: aktörspreferenser, förhandlingsdynamik och institutionell design. I fyra fristående artiklar erbjuder avhandlingen substantiella teoretiska och empiriska bidrag för att åtgärda brister i tidigare forskning. Teoretiskt utvecklar avhandlingen nya och testbara argument om den globala styrningen av AI. Empiriskt banar avhandlingen väg för en omfattande analys av global AI-styrning genom storskalig datainsamling för de enskilda artiklarna, med hjälp av olika metoder för deskriptiv och förklarande analys. Avhandlingen visar att global AI-styrning kännetecknas av tre centrala mönster: heterogena aktörer, institutionell fragmentering och en dominans av icke-bindande regler. Två faktorer framträder konsekvent i artiklarna som drivkrafter bakom dessa mönster: intresseskillnader bland relevanta aktörer och stor osäkerhet kring AI. Avhandlingens resultat bidrar till tre övergripande vetenskapliga debatter: forskning om AI-styrning, global digital styrning och debatter inom internationell politik.



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## The Global Governance of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) poses one of the most consequential governance challenges of the 21st century and states, international organizations, and non-state actors recognize AI as a critical domain for strategic competition and risk mitigation. While policymakers around the world grapple with the question of whether and how to regulate AI, we lack systematic knowledge about the patterns and drivers of global AI governance. This dissertation provides a systematic analysis of three areas of the governance process that hold considerable promise for deepening our understanding of the global governance of AI: actor preferences, bargaining dynamics, and institutional design.

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