

CALL FOR PAPERS: “LAW, CRISIS AND SHIFTING DEMOCRATIC ORDER” CONFERENCE

Dates and Venue of the Conference

-Dates: 2 days conference, 8-9 September 2025

-Venue: University of Geneva

Organizers

Convenor: Mrs Jana Ruwayha (jana.ruwayha@unige.ch)

This conference is organized by the University of Geneva in collaboration with the Faculty of Laws at University College London (UCL).

Conference Theme

Crises challenge governance and the rule of law. From the Covid-19 pandemic and the war on terror to climate change and economic instability, states frequently resort to emergency measures that blur the boundaries between exception and norm. Conventional legal frameworks face growing pressure to adapt to crises. This conference asks to what extent do emergency responses reshape legal and democratic institutions? Where do they reinforce existing structures? Is it better to bend, or to break?

The Covid-19 pandemic prompted extraordinary restrictions in the name of public health, sparking debate over their long-term impact on civil liberties. Climate change is not only leading to rising sea levels and extreme weather events that force revisions of environmental regulations – such as the EU’s evolving Green Deal – but it also challenges traditional regulatory frameworks. Similarly, the war on terror has left enduring legacies in national security legislation, such as the U.S Patriot Act. But do these measures represent structural transformation, or are they temporary adaptations within resilient legal systems?

This conference invites critical reflection on how crises can redefine legal norms and institutions, and how different legal traditions respond to states of emergency. Does the law act as a site of transformation, resistance, or continuity in times of uncertainty?

Main aims of the conference

The conference will feature scholars from both the University of Geneva and University College London. It aims to foster an international and collaborative dialogue on how crises – whether political, environmental, economic, or social—interact with legal frameworks and democratic governance.

It also aims to distinguish between crises generated internally by systemic vulnerabilities (i.e. self-generated crises) and those triggered by external shocks, such as pandemics or environmental disasters. The event will offer a platform for evaluating whether legal responses to emergencies reflect a necessary evolution or a challenge to established legal hierarchies and principles. By examining these issues across different legal contexts – whether it be national, supranational (e.g. EU) or international (multilateral regimes) – the conference seeks to contribute to both academic debates and policy discussions on the future of law and democracy in an era of permacrisis.

Conference sub-themes and areas of inquiry

Potential topics of interest for this conference include, but are not limited to:

- **Evolution of Crisis Discourse:** How have the definitions of crisis, emergency, and exception evolved? Is there a shift from prioritization of civil liberties to a model centered on national security and state interests?
- **Normalization of Emergency Measures:** Analysis of how temporary measures become permanent, and of legal and constitutional consequences.
- **Complexity Theory and Legal Adaptability:** The application of complexity theory to understand legal responses to systemic shocks. How do feedback loops, nonlinearity, and hysteresis influence legal reforms and the resilience of democratic institutions?
- **Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Crisis Management:** Comparative studies that incorporate economic, environmental, and human rights perspectives, and assess legal transformations in diverse jurisdictions (including but not limited to: UK, Ireland, Switzerland, France, U.S., Israel, Egypt).
- **The Rhetoric of Crisis:** Critical analyses of the language used in framing crises (e.g., “fighting an unseen enemy”) and its impact on public policy and legal norms. How does such rhetoric facilitate or obscure the balance between emergency measures and long-term legal stability?

Participation details

- We invite submissions of **abstracts of no more than 500 words** along with a one-page curriculum vitae to Mrs Jana Ruwayha (jana.ruwayha@unige.ch) **by 22 May 2025**. The following information should be included with your abstract: your name, affiliation, email address. Successful applicants will be notified by email **by 6 June 2025**.
- We welcome submissions from academics at all stages, including PhD candidates, post-doctoral researchers and tenured staff.
- A maximum of 10-12 contributions will be selected.
- Speakers at the conference will later be asked to submit a **complete draft of 4'000 to 8'000 words** (footnotes excluded; OSCOLA citation style) of the paper they will present at the conference **by 22 August 2025**.
- During the conference, each speaker will receive feedback from expert commentators and engage in a discussion with other participants.
- Following the conference, all speakers will be invited to submit a final paper. Contributions may be individual or co-authored with other speakers at the conference in view of publication. There is also a potential for these works to be compiled into an edited volume or special journal issue.

Deadlines and Future Publication Information

- Submission of abstracts: 22 May 2025
- Notification of Acceptance: 6 June 2025
- Submission of complete drafts to be circulated before the conference: 22 August 2025
- Conference date and venue: 2 days at the University of Geneva; 8-9 September 2025

Contact

Should you have any questions regarding the conference, feel free to contact Mrs Jana Ruwayha at jana.ruwayha@unige.ch