

# Digital Societies and Governance

## 1. Using Natural Language Processing for Policy Process Research

<b>Convenor</b>	Nihit Goyal, Assistant Professor, TU Delft
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### Call for Abstracts

Despite decades of research on policy processes, cumulative knowledge remains elusive. The challenges grappling the field include: (i) siloed theoretical development with limited synthesis; (ii) disconnect between theory and empirics, with much conceptualization but limited operationalization; (iii) dominance of purposively sampled case studies; and (iv) predominant focus on the Global North. An underlying cause for this status-quo is the effort and time necessary for manual collection, coding, and analysis of textual data—e.g., news articles, official documents, parliamentary speeches, press releases, and social media posts—which is crucial for understanding the institutional context, narratives, and perspectives that shape these processes as well as shed light on the nature of and rationale for official decisions.

Meanwhile, the field of natural language processing (NLP) has witnessed significant advances in the past decades, including developments in classifying text, identifying entities, extracting relationships among concepts, and representing, analysing, and visualizing semantic information. However, the present applications of NLP to policy studies—few and far in between—neither address the challenges identified above nor contribute to the methodological apparatus for policy process research.

Moreover, these techniques might themselves be biased in dealing with data from the Global South. The objective of this panel is to shed light on the potential of NLP for policy process research. We welcome studies that evaluate the strengths and limitations of such techniques, especially in the context of the Global South. The research questions posed in this panel include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Which NLP applications are especially suitable for policy process research?
- Which frameworks or theories of the policy process lend themselves to the use of NLP?
- Which dynamics of the policy process are more (less) amenable for exploration using NLP?
- To what extent are NLP techniques feasible for such research in the context of the Global South?

We invite scholars to submit conceptual, methodological, or empirical papers that engage with research questions focusing on the overarching theme of ‘the use of NLP for policy process research’ (including those posed above). We are especially interested in manuscripts that apply these techniques in a theoretically-informed manner to cases in the Global South—in any policy domain and at any level of government—to evaluate their potential.