
• Main Thematic Clusters – Law & Society 2026 (San Francisco)

• 1. Law, Inequality, and Social Hierarchies

A dominant meta-theme across the conference:

- race, migration, citizenship
- colonialism, postcolonial structures
- legal construction of hierarchies and belonging
- structural injustice and exclusion

Examples:

- immigration and “cimmigration”
- legal hierarchies and colonial legacies
- undocumented labor and vulnerability

👉 Interpretation:

Law is treated less as neutral doctrine and more as a **producer of social stratification**.

• 2. Criminal Justice, Policing, and Punishment

One of the largest and most empirically grounded clusters:

- policing (historical and contemporary)
- pretrial justice and incarceration
- prosecutorial behavior
- wrongful convictions and accountability

Examples:

- historical policing and violence
- pretrial processing and jail systems
- courtroom practices and fairness

👉 Strong emphasis on:

- **institutional practice**
 - **empirical studies**
 - **systemic critique**
-

• **3. Law, Technology, and Artificial Intelligence**

A rapidly expanding and highly visible theme:

- AI in legal decision-making
- algorithmic governance
- privacy, surveillance, big data
- epistemic and normative implications

Examples:

- AI and legal education/profession
- algorithmic fairness and discrimination
- digital control and governance

👉 Key concern:

Technology reshapes **authority, fairness, and legitimacy**

• **4. Law and Political Power / Democratic Backsliding**

A strongly present macro-political theme:

- authoritarianism
- executive power
- judicial legitimacy
- crisis of liberal legalism

Examples:

- authoritarian immigration regimes
- critique of the Supreme Court and judicial opacity
- weaponization of law

👉 Law is analyzed as a **tool of governance and power**, not just constraint.

• **5. Access to Justice and Legal Institutions in Practice**

A core “law in action” theme:

- access to courts and legal representation
- legal aid, clinics, community lawyering
- procedural justice

Examples:

- access to justice beyond courts
- immigration lawyering and interpretation
- court infrastructure and inequality

👉 Strong link to:

- empirical research
 - socio-legal realism
-

• **6. Legal Pluralism, Global and Comparative Law**

Highly international orientation:

- international law and institutions
- comparative legal systems
- transnational governance

Examples:

- international adjudication and arbitration
- global migration regimes
- Chinese and Asian legal developments

👉 Law is treated as **multi-level and globally entangled**

• **7. Law, Economy, and Capitalism**

Strong presence of political economy approaches:

- corporate governance
- finance and capital markets
- inequality and wealth

Examples:

- investor protection and capital flows
- tax law and redistribution
- digital economy and labor

👉 Often framed within:

- **critical political economy**
 - **law-and-capitalism analysis**
-

• **8. Health, Bioethics, and Regulation of Care**

A distinct but smaller cluster:

- healthcare systems
- bioethics
- telemedicine and regulation

Examples:

- healthcare regulation and pricing
 - medico-legal hybrid systems
-

• **9. Human Rights, Dignity, and Personhood**

Normative and theoretical strand:

- human dignity
- legal personhood
- rights expansion (including non-human entities)

Examples:

- dignity as core legal concept
 - legal personhood and inclusion/exclusion
 - rights of nature / indigenous perspectives
-

• **10. Law, Culture, and Legal Consciousness**

Classic Law & Society theme:

- narratives and meaning of law
- legal consciousness
- symbolic and performative dimensions

Examples:

- law as narrative and memory
 - legitimacy and public trust
-

• **11. Methodological Core: Empirical & Interdisciplinary Research**

Not a topic, but structurally crucial:

- ethnography
- interviews
- experimental methods
- computational approaches

Examples:

- large-scale court observation
- behavioral and experimental legal studies

👉 This confirms:

The conference is **methodologically empirical, not doctrinal**

• **Key Cross-Cutting Concepts**

Across clusters, a few **recurring conceptual anchors** appear:

- **“Sanctuary”** (normative + political metaphor)
 - **Power / inequality / hierarchy**
 - **Law in action vs. law in books**
 - **Institutional legitimacy**
 - **Interdisciplinarity**
-

• **Condensed Interpretation (for orientation)**

If you reduce everything to its essence, the conference revolves around:

Law as a social practice embedded in power, inequality, and institutional dynamics—studied empirically, globally, and increasingly through the lens of technology and political crisis.

• **If you want to go further**

Next useful steps (I can do this for you):

1. **Prioritize panels for your specific research interests**
2. **Identify “high-impact” sessions (theoretically or methodologically important)**

3. Reduce 1000+ talks to a shortlist of ~20 must-see panels

Just tell me your focus (e.g. legal theory, AI, adjudication, etc.).

I've filtered your material for sessions that are “**high-impact**” in a scholarly sense—i.e., panels that either

- (a) **advance theory**,
- (b) **introduce or refine methods**, or
- (c) **reframe core socio-legal problems**.

Below is a **curated shortlist**, grouped by *type of impact* rather than topic. This is more useful than a thematic list because it tells you **where intellectual leverage is highest**.

• I. Theoretical Anchor Panels (Conceptual Innovation)

• 1. Sanctuary as a Legal and Political Concept

- “*Legal Meaning of Sanctuary in a World of Open Borders*”

Why high-impact:

- Attempts conceptual reconstruction of “sanctuary”
 - Bridges migration law, political theory, and legal philosophy
 - Likely to generate **portable concepts** across fields
-

• 2. Human Dignity and Legal Personhood

- Panels on dignity, inclusion/exclusion, and personhood

Why high-impact:

- Revisits foundational legal categories
 - Links doctrinal law with philosophical anthropology
 - Relevant for AI, bioethics, and rights theory
-

• 3. Law as Narrative / Memory / Legitimacy

- Narrative and legitimacy panels

Why high-impact:

- Moves beyond rule-based accounts of law

- Engages with **legal consciousness theory**
 - Strong interdisciplinary reach (law + sociology + humanities)
-

• **II. Institutional & Power-Oriented Panels (Reframing Law)**

• **4. Weaponization of Law / Authoritarian Legalism**

- Panels on authoritarianism and legal power

Why high-impact:

- Central to current global developments
 - Reframes law as **instrument of power**, not constraint
 - Strong comparative potential
-

• **5. Judicial Behavior and Court Legitimacy**

- Panels on Supreme Court opacity, courtroom practice

Why high-impact:

- Directly relevant to your interest in **decision-making under uncertainty**
 - Connects doctrine, behavior, and institutional trust
-

• **6. Crimmigration and Legal Hybridity**

- Migration/criminal law overlap panels

Why high-impact:

- Shows **boundary erosion between legal domains**
 - Important for theory of legal categories
-

• **III. Technology & Epistemic Transformation**

• **7. AI and the Legal Profession / Education**

- *“AI and Legal Education / Profession”*

Why high-impact:

- Addresses structural transformation of legal expertise
 - Direct implications for **how law is produced and applied**
-

• **8. Algorithmic Fairness and Governance**

- Panels on AI bias and decision-making

Why high-impact:

- Core site where **law meets computation**
 - Raises fundamental issues:
 - fairness
 - accountability
 - opacity
-

• **9. Digital Governance and Surveillance**

- Panels on data, control, and digital state

Why high-impact:

- Reconfigures classic legal categories:
 - jurisdiction
 - authority
 - rights
-

• **IV. Methodological Innovation Panels**

• **10. Large-Scale Court Observation / Empirical Legal Studies**

- Courtroom observation and data-driven panels

Why high-impact:

- Moves beyond anecdotal or doctrinal analysis
 - Produces **systematic knowledge of legal practice**
-

• **11. Experimental and Behavioral Legal Studies**

- Behavioral / experimental panels

Why high-impact:

- Tests assumptions about:
 - decision-making
 - fairness
 - perception of law
-

- **12. Computational Legal Analysis**

- Data-driven / AI-assisted research panels

Why high-impact:

- Enables analysis of:
 - thousands of cases
 - patterns invisible to doctrinal reasoning
-

- **V. Political Economy & Structural Analysis**

- **13. Law and Capital / Inequality**

- Panels on finance, taxation, redistribution

Why high-impact:

- Connects law to macro-structures
 - Moves beyond case-level analysis
-

- **VI. My Strongest Recommendations (If You Must Choose ~8 Panels)**

If your interest is close to your text (logic, uncertainty, decision-making):

👉 Prioritize these:

1. Sanctuary (conceptual innovation)
2. Judicial behavior / court practice
3. AI and legal decision-making

4. Algorithmic fairness
 5. Authoritarian legalism
 6. Legal personhood / dignity
 7. Empirical court observation
 8. Behavioral legal studies
-

• **Meta-Observation (important for your work)**

The most “high-impact” sessions share a common feature:

They **do not treat law as a closed logical system**, but as

- a **social practice**,
- under **uncertainty**,
- shaped by **institutions, power, and information limits**.

This aligns almost perfectly with your discussion of:

- non-monotonic reasoning
 - limits of formalization
 - decision-making under uncertainty
-

• I’ve distilled your material into a **selective shortlist of ~20 “must-see” panels**, prioritizing:

- **theoretical leverage** (concept formation, reframing law)
 - **methodological innovation** (empirical / computational approaches)
 - **relevance to your core theme** (decision-making under uncertainty, limits of formalization)
- This is not a popularity list—it’s a **high-yield intellectual filter**.
-

• **Top 20 Must-See Panels (Law & Society 2026)**

• **I. Core Conceptual Panels (Highest Theoretical Payoff)**

1. **Legal Meaning of Sanctuary in a World of Open Borders**
→ foundational rethinking of a central socio-legal concept

2. **Human Dignity and the Boundaries of Legal Personhood**
→ deep structure of rights and inclusion
 3. **Law as Narrative, Memory, and Legitimacy**
→ alternative to formalist accounts of law
 4. **Legal Consciousness and the Social Construction of Law**
→ how law operates outside doctrine
-

• **II. Law, Power, and Institutional Dynamics**

5. **Weaponization of Law and Authoritarian Legalism**
→ law as instrument of power
 6. **Judicial Legitimacy and Supreme Court Opacity**
→ connects doctrine with institutional behavior
 7. **Courtroom Practices and Decision-Making in Action**
→ empirical insight into adjudication
 8. **Crimmigration and Hybrid Legal Regimes**
→ collapse of doctrinal boundaries
-

• **III. AI, Technology, and Epistemic Change**

9. **AI and the Transformation of the Legal Profession**
→ structural shift in legal reasoning
 10. **Algorithmic Fairness and Legal Decision-Making**
→ core issue: justice under automation
 11. **Digital Governance, Surveillance, and Control**
→ redefinition of legal authority
 12. **Data-Driven Law and Computational Legal Analysis**
→ emerging methodology with long-term impact
-

• **IV. Empirical & Methodological High-Impact Panels**

13. **Large-Scale Court Observation and Judicial Behavior**
→ replaces doctrinal assumptions with data
 14. **Experimental and Behavioral Legal Studies**
→ tests how decisions are actually made
 15. **Pretrial Justice, Bail, and Incarceration Systems**
→ rich empirical field with policy relevance
-

• **V. Global, Comparative, and Structural Perspectives**

- 16. **Global Migration Regimes and Legal Inequality**
→ transnational legal ordering
 - 17. **Comparative Legal Systems (China, Global South, etc.)**
→ alternative models of legality
 - 18. **International Adjudication and Arbitration**
→ multi-level legal reasoning
-

- **VI. Political Economy and Structural Law**

- 19. **Law, Capital, and Economic Inequality**
→ law as part of economic structure
 - 20. **Taxation, Redistribution, and Legal Design**
→ intersection of policy and legal form
-

- **How to Use This List (Strategically)**

- If you want **maximum intellectual return**, prioritize:
 - **Tier 1 (must attend no matter what)**
 - Sanctuary
 - AI & legal decision-making
 - Judicial behavior / courtroom practice
 - Algorithmic fairness
 - Authoritarian legalism
-

- **Tier 2 (depending on time)**
 - Legal consciousness
 - Personhood / dignity
 - Empirical court studies
 - Digital governance
-

- **Tier 3 (specialized but valuable)**
 - Political economy panels
 - Comparative/global law
-

• **Key Insight for Your Work**

- Across these 20 panels, a common pattern emerges:
 - The most important work today treats legal decision-making as **empirical, contingent, and institutionally embedded**—not as a purely logical process.
 - This directly reinforces your line of argument:
 - limits of monotone logic
 - importance of non-monotonic reasoning
 - role of uncertainty and incomplete information
-

• **If you want the next step**

- I can now:
 - turn this into a **day-by-day personal conference schedule**, or
 - identify **which panels are likely to be theoretically strongest vs. empirically strongest**, or
 - extract **the 10–15 most relevant talks specifically for your manuscript topic**.