

Santander-CIDOB Future Leaders Forum “Emerging Technologies, Digitalisation and the Future of Democracy”

November 19th, 2025, 17h30 - 20h00

In person event in Brussels, Belgium. Blankspace Place du Luxembourg, Rue d'Arlon 80, Brussels.

An initiative of CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs) with the support of Banco Santander

The **Santander-CIDOB Future Leaders Forum** is a collaboration programme between Banco Santander and CIDOB that aims to identify and promote dialogue between future global leaders from different social and economic fields that will shape the international agenda.

The programme, now in its sixth year, seeks to capitalise on the results of previous years to bring together debates and reflections on techno-politics, algorithmic governance, digital sovereignty, the regulation of new technologies and European digital policy, with the theme of this edition: the implications of emerging technologies for the future of democracy in Europe and the world.

New technologies and digitalisation are profoundly transforming the institutional, regulatory and social environment that underpin contemporary democracies. These changes affect not only societies and economies, but also governance frameworks and how power is exercised. This technological progress offers in turn both promises, challenges and threats to democracy in the aspects of electoral processes, decision-making and public management, the guarantee of fundamental rights and the distribution of power among different political, economic and civic actors. The promises of greater citizen participation, broader inclusion in political processes, and improved development, implementation and efficiency of public policies coexist with significant challenges, such as growing social polarisation fuelled by disinformation and algorithms, the violation of rights by digital platforms, and the interference of external actors in democratic processes.

Beyond the positive or negative effects of these tools, and the uses that may lead to illiberal or anti-democratic practices, it is also necessary to rethink how to ensure that the design and use of these new technologies –such as artificial intelligence, digital platforms, and blockchain, among others– respect and reinforce democratic principles. This involves not only regulating their impact but also designing institutional and regulatory frameworks that guide their development and application in line with democratic values.

This sixth edition of the **Santander-CIDOB Future Leaders Forum** seeks to explore the intersection between emerging technologies, democracies and international politics. To analyse this, we will have experts and participants from previous **CIDOB-Santander 35 under 35 lists** who will discuss two major questions: how does technology impact democratic processes, and how can we ensure that technology is used to strengthen our democracies? To this end, we will reflect on the following questions: Under what conditions do new technologies strengthen the design and implementation of public policies, improving the effectiveness of democracies? What weaknesses currently exist in terms of technology strengthening public deliberation and electoral processes? Who participates (and who is excluded) in digitalised decision-making processes guided by new technologies? How can we reduce these challenges and mitigate their harmful effects on societies by respecting fundamental rights and freedoms? What measures should be taken to make these technologies “fit” for democracy? What successful examples of development initiatives or governance frameworks that guarantee technologies aimed at promoting democracy do we have?

Methodology

For the first time, the sixth edition of the **Santander-CIDOB Future Leaders Forum** will be held in person in Brussels, and will gather members of the four **Santander -CIDOB 35 under 35 lists**, which have recognised the work of 140 young people – aged 35 or under – who are currently working as leaders in various fields related to new technologies (public decision-makers, private sector, third sector activists, media, intellectuals and academics). This edition will respond to requests from those selected to hold this forum in person and in the European city with the highest concentration of leaders from the four lists.

The **Santander-CIDOB Future Leaders Forum** will consist of two parts. First, an opening presentation by Samantha Bradshaw, an expert on the relationship between emerging technologies, security and democracy. Second, we will conduct two short speed-debating sessions dedicated to gathering the reflections, ideas and policy proposals of young people in four key areas: disinformation and electoral processes, the rise of technology in decision-making and political management, the impact of new technologies on fundamental rights, and the relationship between large platforms and the exercise of democracy.

Prior to the event, participants will choose two of the four debate topics according to their interests. The facilitator of the table will briefly present the state of the art of their topic and then facilitate a conversation among the participants to identify possible political solutions for 30 minutes. During the debate, the facilitators will take note of the conclusions of the debate, which will be shared at the end of the session with a 10-minute joint debate.

Programme

17.30 Welcoming words

Alicia Sanchis Arellano, Head of EU Government Relations, Banco Santander.

Inés Arco Escriche, Research Fellow, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB).

17.35 Keynote Speech

Samantha Bradshaw, Director, Center for Security, Innovation and New Technology, American University.

18.00 Speed-debating on technology and the future of democracy

- *Digital infrastructures, electoral integrity and democratic participation*, moderated by: **Itxaso Domínguez de Olazábal**, Policy Advisor, European Digital Rights.
- *Artificial Intelligence, policymaking and public administration*, moderated by: **Javier Borrás**, Research Fellow, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB).
- *Fundamental rights and emerging technologies*, moderated by: **Johannes Anttila**, Policy Advisor, European Parliament.
- *Big Tech, regulation and democracy resilience*, moderated by: **Sofia Calabrese**, Digital Policy Manager, European Partnership for Democracy.

18.50 Conclusions

Javier Borrás, Research Fellow, Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB)

19.00 Networking and drinks