THE AULA FELLOWSHIP

Power at Davos and What We Propose to Do About It

This is an Annex to: AI House Davos 2026 Debrief

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This is a reference document to present the reasoning for our report: AI House Davos 2026 Debrief: Convening 5 Global Conversations on AI. The authors are:

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Executive Summary of the Power Annex

This report begins with a discussion of **Policy Implications**, and how we can find allies. We used a set of selection criteria: **Will, Honesty, Courage, Hope**, defining an ally as someone who has the power and the will to act in favor of the mission to ensure that everyone can access the conversation on AI. At AI House Davos 2026, we sought out, and found, people who displayed honesty about complex contemporary challenges, courage in how they view their own power to act, and hope that things can work out for the best. These qualities are indicators that the person may be willing and able to take action.

In **Power**, we analyze AI House as a field-configuring event. During such events, people exchange ideas, and some change their minds about their future actions. Formal/institutionalised and informal/social forms of power shape what directions become possible.

Types of Power Observed distinguishes between formal power vested in regulators, executives, sponsors, and organizers, and informal power exercised by curated audiences, media, academics, and local actors. Mapping these powers clarifies who can act and whose perspectives shape governance trajectories.

In **Not Present / Missing Voices**, we identify underrepresented perspectives: small organizations, civil society advocates, cultural sectors, protestors, women, Africans, South Americans, Island and Pacific Nations and other peoples from the Global Majority, and people involved in using AI in military and security settings — including procurement actors, manufacturers, and the victims of security and military tech. These absences indicate where AI governance is missing actual perspectives. Each gap is both a weakness in governance and an opportunity for people to step in and have voice.

Strategic Implications follows directly. Decision makers and technologists know that fit to purpose decisions require everyone to join in the conversation. Power abhors a vacuum. Observing where power concentrates reveals where access to the conversation on AI is limited. Where there are gaps in potential power, there is an opportunity for new voices to step in. The strategic question is structural: presuming on the good intent of decision-makers, how do we ensure that everyone can access the conversation on AI?

In **Designing the 5 Convenings on AI**, Aula Fellows propose to operationalize the Aula Convening Guidelines at the level of mass public participation through sector-specific global conversations designed to engage the missing voices identified in this political analysis, specifically in fields in which Aula Fellows have a measure of access to decision makers.

Finally, **Post Script: Who are the Tech Diplomats?** examines the professional class shaping AI governance, asking what power they have, how they use it, what constraints they face, and how we can help them build legitimacy for collective decision-making?

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Power at Davos and What We Propose to Do About It

Policy Implications

People with courage, honesty, and hope

We defined a selection algorithm for our question on whether we can find allies in Davos during the WEF. An ally is defined as someone who has the power and the will to act in favor of the mission to ensure that everyone can access the conversation on AI.

Will: We sought out, and found, people who displayed honesty about complex contemporary challenges, courage in how they view their own power to act, and hope that things can work out for the best. We focused our efforts on questions addressing will in relation to power, and, in doing so, we were open to receiving their opinion of the complex situations at hand, on the nature of their power, and the methods at their disposal.

Honesty: This is the most salient measure for alliances: because we can't get anywhere in collaborations without honesty, and in situations of unclear transparency, its presence is an indicator of courage, of personal power, and of will.

Courage: It takes a lot of work to get to these conversations. Education, connections, money, a team of helpers. Once there, it takes courage to speak the truth, which is to risk one's often hard-earned social position by taking a position. There are also agency problems, for the people who represent organizations (the majority, at Davos). Courage can indicate that a person has a measure of independence in decision making, which is a form of power.

Hope: In terms of like-minded allies who can move resources to support an international, society-wide conversation on what we, all of the people, want for and from AI. Some people choose to wield power because they want to do well with it. If they are there for good and rational purposes, they show signs of hope that their good and rational purposes will prevail.

Power in Tech Diplomacy

In addition to seeking out individuals who demonstrate the characteristics of honesty, courage, and hope; we considered the different types of power present in the Davos/WEF pop-up community. ONe can think of power in different ways. In the context of the field of AI, we have thought about formal/institutionalised and informal/social forms of power, and missing voices. Specifically, we were interested in people's role in the field of AI and AI-related decision making, in governance and in the businesses they represent. That is because AI House Davos provides a field-configuring event. During any event where people gather, they exchange ideas, and some of them change their minds. Specifically, they change their minds about their future actions. The types of power vary for the different people present. In observing these powers and how they are wielded, for example the formal power of working for a large organization, the informal power of the designers who create the pavilions, or of the people whose challenges are understood by so few as to seem silent in those streets.

There is a principle represented in the phrase "power abhors a vacuum". The power observed in a field-configuring event like the WEF week at Davos can give indications on where there may be gaps in coverage. This can empower strategic choices and tactical planning for field actors wishing to engage in these WEF/Davos and related events throughout the year. For example, we note that artists were nearly invisible. Therefore, the power of art may be under-used or under-appreciated. It is an indication that there may be something artists can do to amplify their messages during these types of governance conferences.

Types of power observed

Formal power is defined as power vested in people, such as national and international regulators, executives of big and/or wealthy companies or institutions, sponsors of individual events, and organizers of related event venues on the Davos Promenade. This is the most obvious form of power in the events. People conspicuously have badges or other regalia to indicate their national and corporate allegiances.

Informal power is defined as the curated attendees/audiences, media, and decision makers from large NGOs. This includes local people, who are no strangers to international politics. They are multilingual, well-educated inhabitants of a Swiss canton that has received international visitors for centuries (yes, centuries.) AI House also includes a large contingent of academics, which is a contrast with most other events we attended, and by design by the organizers.

Not present/ missing voices

Full disclosure on our stance: we have a research stream on inclusion: contact Dr. Branislav Radeljic, Dir of Research, Onyedikachi Amaerie-Okora, Inclusion Lead, and several Fellows whose whole professional careers are dedicated to inclusive democracy. We also have a rapid exit protocol for racism. No choice: it's rampant and destructive. We work on the principle that there can be no solution for destructive habits that doesn't include the needs and will of everyone involved.

There is an obvious and repeated problem of access for people from the global majority. The groups of people from which tech diplomats are trained are not represented in proportion of importance.

Specifically of interest to the Aula Fellowship, because we may be able to do something about it:
- Small organizations (SMEs, civil society advocates, smaller think tanks). We think this has several reasons. Perhaps it is a measure of interest. Perhaps it is a measure of how expensive and complex it can be to put together a team for such an event. (Thank you, team and sponsors!)
- Cultural sectors are disproportionately invisible, as compared to their potential for empowering transformations of norms.
- Protestors are put in actual concrete-delineated pens. Politely, but very firmly. The small town brings in police forces from nearby cantons. Neatly segmented social spaces; and, while it makes us socially comfortable, do not allow for engaging minority or disruptive ideas. In terms of voice, the protestors (and the police) should have seats at the table. Their presence and work are a high fidelity, high data signal to help improve our social systems.
- Women: only 20% of the attendees identify as women, though there are signs that this gap is being addressed, like the Female Quotient house and Qatari focus on inclusion.
- Africans, South Americas, Island and Pacific Nations and other peoples from the Global Majority are disproportionately absent. This is a large systemic weakness in governance. We as a global society can't make good decisions without these communities, because we humans can't imagine realities that we don't inhabit.
- People involved in using AI in military and security settings. We were able to observe and join military and security presentations on AI, and AI House did have public conversations on how these technologies are to be governed. However, military and security procurement, military manufacturers, and the victims of security and military tech were not conducting public conversation on what the people might need or want from Military AI.
- There appears to us to be an aesthetic gap at Davos. In addition to being a work of intellect and socialising; the experience of Davos is itself intensely aesthetic. Switzerland is near-constantly stunning. And people dress in their best, the spaces, the food: everything is very beautiful. Soigné. At the same time, with few exceptions like Wisdom House, House of God, DJ events… the aesthetics don't have an outlet to cultural

connections. There is very little room for philosophy. Nor spiritual reflection. Nor the sharing afforded by aesthetic experiences.
- There may be a kind of "pretiness effect", wherein a uniform code of dress and conduct functions to exclude the necessary messiness of democratic governance. Some Fellows are exploring this area.

We can't speak of private chalet events, as we have not sought them out. We attended public events, some of which we asked to attend, some by invitation, some because we knew some people in town. There are many places that have open door / constant networking / and/or that accepted late requests for invitations. There are many doors that were not open to us, and certainly more than we could see.

Strategic Implications

If we are to believe many of the people we met, who are involved in decisions on how AI is implemented in society, if we are to believe the human rights work of organisations, like Mila and the OECD, then decision makers and technologists, to their credit, know that they need everyone else in the conversation. One can argue that there is no way more suited to the design for good, useful, sustainable AI.

The different groups with power to act and with resources to bear each have different means of access, but it helps to engage in multiple informal conversations to feel the other person's, for lack of a better word, "vibe". Specifically, that feeling you can get, that tells you if you think the other person is sincere. We know these can give biased interpretations. So, at the same time, we observe people by their actions. Observation was a particularly valuable teamwork function, as our team of Fellows gave us real-time assistance in identifying people and briefing us on their publicly available works.

In terms of limitations, readers are invited to keep the following in mind. We were two people in Davos, supported by a dozen or so Fellows working from home. Most, though not all, of the team were new to this context. This was a scouting event for 2027. We were at AI House Davos, not the WEF. We've watched the WEF and several adjacent events online, including all the public AI House events from prior years.

We can somewhat balance these limitations because of our structure. The majority of Fellows are from the Global Majority. In terms of specialised lenses, we have collectively as a Fellowship attended hundreds of AI governance events and conversations since our founding in 2023.

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Designing these 5 Convenings on AI

As a consequence of our 2025 Works, culminating in our presence at AI House Davos 2026, Aula Fellows are proposing to operationalize the Aula Convening Guidelines at the level of mass public participation.

We are convening a series of sector-specific global conversations. These convened events differ from standard conferences in a few significant ways.

Town-hall style discussions (no panels).
Held in cultural alignment with direct democracy.
We invite the whole gamut of people who are involved in the sector/hard question.
Each partner presents their written position statement 1 month prior, and they are open for comments.
Each partner pays according to their means.
Artists, comedians, philosophers, spiritual leaders, youth, and social scientists accompany the process.
Entirely filmed, recorded, and streamed online.
Massive online participation mechanisms.

The principle of bringing in all parties is the basis for the Aula Convening Guidelines, and also historically the basis for the creation of modern multi-camerate democratic systems. We have these, for example in Canada, in modern day Switzerland, in regional and Indigenous political systems worldwide, and under the ancient Great Peace of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Each convening has an organizing committee who apply the Aula Convening Guidelines, establish and invite the parties, design for a positive impact on civil society's power, facilitate the events, and handle post event coordinations.

You can find out more in the main report: AI House Davos 2026 Debrief: Convening 5 Global Conversations on AI

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References

To follow the news as the projects develop:

Website: https://theaulafellowship.org/works
LinkedIn: https://ca.linkedin.com/company/aula-fellowship

Swissinfo story on our Davos 2026 Project:
Link: https://theaulafellowship.org/2026/02/04/aula-in-the-news-davos-2026-swissinfo/

Reference Documents:
- ❖ Aula Convening Guidelines:
- ❖ The scientific work that supports the convening guidelines can be found here (request permission to access this).
- ❖ On the missing voices in conversations on AI in society
- ❖ Executive Summary of our 2026 Fundraiser for our Annual Report and Davos 26 Trip
- ❖ Aula @ Davos media kit
- ❖ Calls for contributors and events budgets: Current Projects

Other Fellowship Works:
Ongoing collaborative research: see the Works & News.
Contact: Branislav for collaboration and training.

Policy briefings.
Contact: Ley Muller for collaboration and training.

& Several smaller events
Contact: Andrew Ham for coordination.

Current Projects seeking collaborations and support. Includes the Events Budgets tab and opportunities for collaborations.

Post Script: Who are the Tech Diplomats?

We note for further reflection that people know each other at these events, and have often seen each other's work beforehand. International AI governance conferences often assemble several of the same individuals. At the same time, the individual people working in tech diplomacy are not uniform, and do not all represent historically patriarchal, colonial, supremacist ideologies. We assert and can give specific examples of people working on AI Tech Diplomacy who want it to go well for all humanity and the future. You can find them working on AI in every field (we can help, if you want, just ask). In addition to doing concrete work with their powers, in conferences these people exhibit honesty and hope. We also found many who exhibit courage, though it may be harder to spot or to show courage than it is to show candid honesty and pragmatic hope. Based on observations, our premise is that tech diplomacy is a profession that many choose by vocation, and that many of them share the concerns of all the people. Including the troubles of insufficient inclusion. Several questions remain. How many tech diplomats want to have an inclusive democracy? What power do they have? How do they choose to use it? What are their constraints? How can we help them to build legitimacy for collective decision-making?

This is the end of the annex. Thank you for your interest in tech governance.