

# Blockchain Solutions to Socio-Political Problems

An Exploration of Current Issues in Web3

HLS Beyond Mini Seminar

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## Synopsis

Particularly in recent years, blockchains and "web3" have been proposed as a panacea for technical and socio-political problems. Blockchain-based projects have emerged promising to do everything from banking the unbanked, to powering real estate transactions, to tackling the issue of misinformation, to empowering artists. In this series of conversations, we will look at several of these broad categories of blockchain-based projects and critically discuss: what are the problems that actually need to be solved? Do blockchains offer a viable solution? What are the limitations and trade-offs? And what are the implications of deploying blockchains in these ways? What can we learn from existing projects that have attempted to solve these problems?

## Format

I will begin each seminar with a brief overview of that day's topic, but devote most of the time to open-ended discussion. The readings specified below will serve as a jumping-off point for discussion, so it is essential that you read them and prepare questions and topics for further discussion. I would also encourage you to investigate the example projects listed for each session — in particular, the ones marked in bold are likely to come up in the discussion. If you would like to research the topic areas more broadly before each session to help formulate your thoughts, I would encourage you to, and if you find any material that you find particularly thought-provoking please send it to me so I can also read it in advance!

For each day, I have assigned a group of students to do a particularly deep dive on the readings. These students should read the material, prepare some questions and discussion points as a group, and **send them to me in advance** of the session. There is no need to engage in a deep discussion of the readings before the session — that is what the in-person time is for — but please do try to come up with questions that will spark engaging discussion that will dive into some of the deeper topics rather than staying at surface-level.

These sessions will operate under [Chatham House Rules](#) to encourage open discussion, meaning that you are free to discuss the topics from the class, but should not attribute statements or opinions to any specific individuals.

## Background

If you are unfamiliar with blockchains, cryptocurrencies, and web3, it will be useful to familiarize yourself with the broad topic area and terminology. *Bloomberg* has a good [primer](#). My *Web3 is Going Just Great* project has a [glossary](#) that can aid with jargon. It will also be useful to get a sense of the ideology behind crypto — namely when it comes to topics like "decentralization" and "trustlessness". I have uploaded a recording of one of my [lectures](#) on the subject in case it is useful.

If you would like to familiarize yourself with my background and work, I'd encourage you to check out [Web3 is Going Just Great](#), subscribe to my [newsletter](#), and take a look through some of my [essays](#) on cryptocurrencies and blockchains.

## March 6: Dispute resolution

### Readings:

- "[Crowd Arbitration: Blockchain Dispute Resolution](#)", Aleksei Gudkov. *Legal Issues in the Digital Age*, no. 3, pp. 59–77. 2020.
- "[Decentralized Justice: A Comparative Analysis of Blockchain Online Dispute Resolution Projects](#)", Yann Auidef, Federico Ast, and Bruno Deffains. *Frontiers in Blockchain*, vol. 4. 2021.
- "[Ethnographic Research of Proof of Humanity DAO](#)", Jamilya Kamalova, Sofia Cossar, and Tara Merk. *BlockchainGov*. 2022.

**Example projects:** [Kleros](#) (whitepaper), [Aragon Court](#) (whitepaper), [Jur](#) Dispute Resolution Module ([blog post](#), [specification](#), *concept only*)

## March 27: The music industry

### Readings:

- "[The networked record industry: How blockchain technology could transform the record industry](#)", Marcus O'Dair and Zuleika Beaven. *Strategic Change*, vol. 26, no. 5, pp. 471–480. 2017.
- "[A Critical Examination of the Application of Blockchain Technology to Intellectual Property Management](#)", Kensuke Ito and Marcus O'Dair. *Business Transformation Through Blockchain*, pp. 317–335. 2019.
- "Case study: Why you can't put the music industry on a blockchain", David Gerard. *Attack of the 50 Foot Blockchain*, pp. 135–149. 2017. **PDF attached**, distributed with permission from the author.

**Example projects:** [Audius](#) (whitepaper), [Sound](#) (blog post), [Ujo Music](#) (defunct), [Mycelia](#) (heavily delayed, possibly abandoned)

## April 17: "Truth" — Anti-misinformation and fact-checking

### Readings:

- "[Drivers and Barriers for Using Blockchain Technology to Create a Global Fact-Checking Database](#)", Malin Picha Edwardsson and Walid Al-Saqaf. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, vol. 12, no. 4. 2022.
- "[Ideologies of Autonomy](#)", Christopher M. Cox. *Wikipedia@20*. 2019.
- "[The Wikipedia Competitor That's Harnessing Blockchain For Epistemological Supremacy](#)", Peter Rubin. *Wired*. 2017.

**Example projects:** [Golden Wiki](#) and [Knowledge Graph](#) (docs), [Everipedia](#) (whitepaper, defunct — pivoted to [IQ.wiki](#)), [Civil](#) (draft whitepaper, defunct)