Threats from Data Protection and from Ethics Committees as Applied to Social Science

Ross Anderson:

Laws relating to information, such as data protection, copyright and computer misuse, tend to be so badly drafted that there's a substantial gap between what the law seems to say on its face and how it's enforced in normal practice. People considered to be "good guys", from academics through newspapers to NGOs such as Amnesty International, usually benefit from a relaxed interpretation. But this creates the illusion of academic freedom rather than the reality.

Academics with unpopular opinions can find themselves exposed in ways they never imagined, while even conformists can find their work obstructed by risk-averse university bureaucrats who gold-plate the law.