

**SAFI's 7th annual
conference**

Enabling Democracy

**30th September to 2nd October 2026
at the University of Bonn**



In recent years, the rise of authoritarian and populist tendencies within democracies once considered stable has become a matter of deep concern. Despite the urgency of this development, systematic knowledge of the underlying causes and the mechanisms capable of countering this development remains fragmented and incomplete. This points to a pressing need for reflection on what enables democracy to function and endure. The conference takes this challenge as its starting point. It seeks to identify the social, institutional, and normative foundations that sustain democratic governance and to explore how these can be strengthened. Therefore it seeks a dialog between *political science, sociology, law, philosophy, and related disciplines* to chart new pathways for the renewal of democracy.

We are looking forward to panels on the following topics:

- **Democratic Capabilities/Enabling Civil Society**
- **Necessities of Social Inclusion**
- **Modes of Participation**
- **Social Cohesion and Collective Building**
- **Education and the Organization of Knowledge**
- **Trust and Commitment**
- **Modern Mechanisms of Democracy Protection**

With keynote speeches by Cristina Lafont, Astrid Séville, Michaela Hailbronner and Lisa Herzog.

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30th September

12:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Registration

1:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. SAFI Meeting

1:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. **Welcome Greeting & Start of the Conference**

Prof. Dr. Laura Münkler, University of Bonn (Law):
The potential of democratic empowerment

2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. **Panel 1: Democratic Capabilities & Enabling Civil Society**

Chair: Prof. Dr. Paul Marx, University of Bonn (Political Science)

- Prof. Dr. Jean-Michel Bonvin, University of Geneva (Sociology): *Enhancing Democratic Capabilities by Social Investments*
- Prof. Dr. Cara Röhner, Hochschule RheinMain (Law): *Enabling Democracy by law*
- Ann-Katrin Habbig, Utrecht University (Ethics): *Legal Capabilities for Democracy*

4:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. Coffee Break

4:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. **Panel 2: Social Cohesion & Collective Building**

Chair: Prof. Dr. Friedrich Kießling, University of Bonn (History)

- Prof. Dr. Sandrine Baume, University of Lausanne (Philosophy/ Political Science): *Cohesion by Compromise*
- Dr. Michael Molavi, Lund University (Law): *Collective Building by legal group formation*
- Dr. Miguel Egler, Tilburg University (Philosophy): *Illusory Intimacy, Authentic Representation: The Dual Nature of Parasocial Politics*

6:30 p.m.

Keynote

Prof. Dr. Cristina Lafont, Northwestern University, Illinois (Philosophy): *Making democracy work*



1st October

9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m. Panel 3: Trust and Commitment

Chair: Prof. Dr. Matthias Braun, University of Bonn (Ethics)

- Prof. Dr. Rieke Trimcev, University of Halle-Wittenberg (Political Science): *Commitment and Democratic Society*
- Prof. Dr. David Vitale, University of Warwick (Law): *Building Trust by law*
- Josefina Sommer, Dr. Philipp Mendoza, Prof. Dr. Alexander Wuttke, LMU Munich (Political Science/ Sociology/ Psychology): *The Good Democrat: A new Scale to Measure Democratic Commitment*

11:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. Coffee Break

11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. Panel 4: Democratic Education and Knowledge Organization

Chair: Jun.-Prof. Dr. Rosario Figari Layus, University of Bonn (Sociology)

- Dr. Elif Askin, University of Zurich (Law): *Creating democratic information environments*
- Prof. Dr. Catherine Holst, University of Oslo (Philosophy): *Science in Democracy: Democratizing expertise*
- Dr. Tobias Albrecht, University of Münster (Political Science): *Democratic Education in an Age of Deep Pluralization and Individualization*

1:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. Lunch Break

2:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Panel 5: Necessities of Social Inclusion

Chair: Jun.-Prof. Dr. Hanno Kruse, University of Bonn (Sociology)

- Dr. Chiara Valentini, University of Bologna (Philosophy): *Deliberation as Mode of Inclusion*
- Dr. Marta Żerkowska-Balas, SWPS University Warschau (Sociology/Political Science): *Engaging young Citizen to prevent an authoritarian backlash*
- Ilenia Bruna Marraffa, Università degli Studi Mediterranea di Reggio Calabria (UniRC)(Law): *The democratic paradox: self-subjection and strategies of psychic decolonisation*
- Daniela Langen, University of Hildesheim (Philosophy): *Enabling a sense of being entitled to participate in democratic decision-making?*

5:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. Coffee Break

5:30 p.m. - 6:30 p.m. Keynote

Prof. Dr. Astrid Séville, University Lüneburg (Political Science): *Generalisability: An Enabling Condition for Democracy?*

7:30 p.m. Conference Dinner



2nd October

9:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m. Keynote

Prof. Dr. Lisa Herzog, University of Groningen
(Philosophy): *The democratic marketplace*

10:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. Coffee Break

10:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Panel 6: Modes and Relevance of Participation

Chair: Dr. Kristin Albrecht, University of Linz (Law)

- Dr. Marie Isabel Theuwis, University of Brussels, Center for the Study of Politics (Cevipol) (Political Science/ Psychology): *Innovating Democratic Participation*
- Dr. Samira Akbarian, University of Frankfurt (Law): *Criticism as a mode of participation*
- Dr. Elif Can Çalıcı, Izmir University of Economics (Law): *Strategic Litigation as a Mode of Democratic Participation*
- Dr. Felix Petersen, University of Münster (Political Science): *On the relevance of political experience for a democratic praxis*

1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m. Lunch Break

2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m. Panel 7: Modern Mechanisms of Democratic Protection

Chair: Dr. Sabrina Zucca-Soest, University of the Federal Armed Forces Hamburg (Political Science)

- Prof. Dr. Eleonora Bottini, Science Po University Paris (Law): *Enforcing Democracy by law*
- Dr. Anna Fruhstorfer, Free University of Berlin/WZB (Political Science): *Constitutionalization of Minority Rights*
- Dr. Wojciech Engelking, University of Warsaw (Law): *Enabling Democracy under Institutional Pluralism: Jurisprudential Methodologies for Public-Private Governance*

4:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. Coffee Break

4:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. Practical Insight Session

Dr. Andreas Oldenbourg und Paulina Fröhlich, Das Progressive Zentrum: *Implementing Democratic Reforms*

5:30 p.m.

Keynote

Prof. Dr. Michaela Hailbronner, LL.M. (Yale), University of Münster (Law): *Constitutional mechanisms for optimizing democracy*

End of Conference