

Enabling Democracy – Call for Abstracts

30th September to 2th October 2026 at the University of Bonn (Germany)

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. Relevant questions arise in particular within the following thematic areas: *Democratic capabilities and the enabling of civil society; modes of participation; the necessities of social inclusion; social cohesion and collective building; education and the organization of knowledge; trust and commitment; as well as modern mechanisms of democracy protection.*

By addressing these dimensions, the conference aims to deepen the understanding of how democracies can be made resilient – not only through legal and institutional safeguards, but also through civic empowerment, social solidarity, and new modes of participation. It invites contributions that explore the theoretical premises and the practical instruments that foster the vitality of democratic life, bridging *insights from political science, sociology, law, philosophy, and related disciplines* to chart new pathways for the renewal of democracy. This interdisciplinary dialogue seeks to move beyond isolated analyses toward a holistic understanding of the enabling conditions of democracy.

We welcome papers addressing, among others, the following questions:

- How can individual and collective capabilities be strengthened to enable participation and self-governance? What institutional and social preconditions foster these capabilities, and how can they be expanded across diverse contexts? In what ways can

civil society be empowered to act as a stabilizing and transformative force within democratic systems?

- Which new or hybrid forms of democratic participation are emerging, and how can they enhance inclusion and legitimacy?
- How can democratic institutions and policies ensure genuine inclusion across lines of class, culture, and migration?
- What social, economic, and communicative conditions are necessary to maintain cohesion and trust among increasingly diverse populations?
- How can shared imaginaries and narratives of belonging be cultivated to sustain collective democratic identities?
- What role do education and knowledge production play in fostering democratic competence and critical reflection?
- How can trust in democratic institutions and mutual commitment among citizens be rebuilt and maintained over time?
- Which legal, institutional, and digital safeguards can effectively protect democracy against erosion from within and without?

Submission Guidelines

The conference will be held from **30th September to 2th October 2026** at the **University of Bonn (Germany)**. The conference language is English.

Please submit an anonymized abstract of no more than **500 words** and a short CV, both as separate PDF files by the **16.01.2026** to **enablingdemocracy@uni-bonn.de** (Chair for Public Law and Legal Philosophy, Prof. Dr. Laura Münkler). Notifications of acceptance will be sent by **13.02.2026**.

Each speaker will have **20 minutes** to present their paper in a renowned panel, followed by a discussion. The panels will be composed of invited professors and young researchers from different disciplines.

Selected papers may be considered for publication. The expected paper length (if accepted) is **8.000–10.000 words** (optional submission before the conference).