

WORKSHOP

**SUSTAINING HUMAN RIGHTS**

**AGAINST FAR-RIGHT THREATS TO DEMOCRACY**

CALL FOR PARTICIPATION!

Workshop #1: University of Connecticut, September 19-20, 2024

Organizers: Lynne Tirrell (UConn, Philosophy, HRTS), Niels Weidtmann (U. Tübingen, College of Fellows), Sara Bangert (U. Tübingen, College of Fellows), Rolf Frankenberger (U. Tübingen, Institute for Research on Far-Right Extremism)

Submit: Title and Abstract (500-word limit) to [info@cof.uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:info@cof.uni-tuebingen.de)

Due: June 1, 2024

Notifications: by June 30, 2024

All presentations and papers should be in English.

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In light of the growing threat to democracy from the extreme right, the upcoming U.S. presidential elections in November 2024 and the German parliamentary elections in September 2025 are particularly important for the future and sustainability of international human rights policy. We hope you will join us to present your professional perspectives and analyses of right-wing mobilization and discuss possible strategies against, for making democracy more resilient against authoritarian politics. We encourage proposals for collaborative projects; individual projects are welcome too, of course.

*Limited funding for travel is available for members of the Human Rights Research Consortium:*

<https://hrrc.bwggermany.uconn.edu/>

*We encourage participants to use institutional funding if possible.*

Workshop #1 Format: Short presentations (30 minutes) with discussion following each. Possible topics are highlighted below, but the list is not exhaustive by any means. Our goal is to have deep conversations that enrich our current and future work and build collaborations within and across our countries; we aim for the development of collaborative thematic panels presenting more elaborate research outcomes at Workshop #2 at the University of Tübingen in July 2025. A second Call will go out for Workshop #2, and new work will be welcome then. We envision developing the papers presented at both workshops for publication in a special issue or in thematic clusters in one or more peer reviewed journals. In addition to the presentations and discussions during the Workshop #1 sessions, we intend to hold two evening public events on 19 and 20 September.

Narrative: The rise in Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism, misogyny, hatred of LGBTQI+ and other exclusionary forms of extreme right-wing ideology can be found in almost all liberal democracies in recent years. These trends are growing. Accordingly, an increasing social and political polarization can be observed, which is accompanied by the poisoning and erosion of social cohesion in society, a decline in democratic quality and even democratic regression. All these social and political shifts

threaten Human Rights while undermining democratic institutions. The election campaigns and Donald Trump's time in office in the USA are paradigmatic of this. Under his aegis, the already existing social divisions not only came to light but were deliberately fueled and intensified. In 2022, Amnesty International reported Human Rights abuses by the Trump Administration in these key areas: sexual and reproductive rights, gender-based violence, LGBTQI+rights, refugees' and migrants' rights; freedom of assembly, excessive use of force; death penalty; arbitrary detention; torture and ill-treatment of detainees; failing to address the climate crisis and environmental degradation, and more.

The rise of the right-wing party "Alternative for Germany" ("Alternative für Deutschland", AfD) at national and regional level is exemplary of a very similar development of social division in Germany, where many of these same abuses were also recorded. The Amnesty list for Germany in 2022 begins with discrimination, mentioning racial profiling, antisemitism, and discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Under increasing threat: right to privacy; sexual and reproductive rights, gender-based violence, LGBTQI+rights, refugees' and migrants' rights; freedom of assembly; corporate accountability; failure to address the climate crisis and environmental degradation, and more.

In this situation, both, the USA and Germany are facing landmark elections. Nothing less is at stake than the preservation of liberal democracy. Replacing liberal democracies with autocratic regimes would deal major blows to human rights.

In November 2024, Americans will be called upon to elect a new president. The likely Republican candidate, Donald Trump, has already shown in his first term of office, and especially at the end of it, what he thinks of democracy, human and civil rights, freedom, respect, and tolerance: nothing. By allying with extreme right-wing and evangelical circles, he normalizes their exclusionary and anti-democratic agenda. And through his constant agitation against democrats, migrants, and international partners, he has left behind a poisoned climate in the country and internationally, which he continues to fuel, and which his successor Joe Biden has only been able to change to a limited extent. This is because social and political polarization has intensified and the rifts between the political camps have become deeper.

In Germany, the Bundestag will be re-elected in September 2025. And these elections will also point the way forward. The extreme right-wing and populist party AfD, which is currently polling between 20 and 30%, also relies on nationalist, exclusionary, derogatory, and inhumane themes and rhetoric in its programme and in its appearance and incites hatred against the federal government. In addition, the AfD is closely networked with right-wing extremists who want to abolish the free and democratic basic order, and in particular with proponents of the New Right who explicitly delegitimize the founding principles (equality, liberalism), the intention and the recognition of Human Rights. If, as the polls suggest, the AfD receives around or over 30% of the vote in some federal states and possibly also at national level, this would not only result in a considerable, further-reaching shift to the right but could also make it difficult or even impossible to form a government (apart from an all-party government against the AfD) and thus strengthen its position.

Scholars, politicians, and activists for democracy face the challenge of how to make sense of and deal with these developments. We want to address these and other concerns in the run-up to and aftermath of the two elections:

- How should we best analyze and address the phenomena behind political polarization and mobilization?
- How do shifts in discourse occur (with special attention to extremist rhetorical strategies)?

- What strategies does the far-right pursue in the USA and Germany to undermine human and civil rights, and how can they be countered?
- What arguments, narratives, *topoi*, and frames does right-wing populism and extremism use to delegitimize human rights and the values and standards of communication of liberal democratic societies?
- What media strategies (e.g. social media) and communication patterns does the right successfully use to assert its sovereignty of interpretation and information policy? How can democratic actors counter them?
- What role do extremist rhetoric, hate speech, negative campaigning, hatred, and agitation play in online and offline election campaigns and beyond?
- What role do conspiracy ideologies play in damaging human rights to democratic participation and trust in institutions and each other?
- How can defenders of democracy and human rights improve discursive norms?
- How can we make democracy more resilient against authoritarian threats?
- With authoritarian discourses deriding human rights and the institutions that protect rights, are there legal avenues worth pursuing?

Our international interdisciplinary cooperation should lead to several products and ideally to a longer-term cooperation. In addition to the presentations and discussions during the workshop sessions, we plan for:

1. Public engagement & media: The workshops and discussions will be accompanied and documented by film teams (UConn, UT). Several short videos (for rapid dissemination) and possibly one longer documentary film will be produced, bringing together the political events and the scientific analyses and thus making research results accessible to a broader public.
2. Public events at each workshop: We plan for two evening public events during Workshop#1 on 19 and 20 September (UConn), as well as for public events during Workshop #2 (UT).
3. Scholarly publications: We plan to turn the contributions to the workshops into a special issue of one or more peer-reviewed journals, such as *The Journal of Human Rights*, *The Journal of Global Philosophy* (open access), and others, which will present the results to the scholarly and scientific community. We are already negotiating with editors.

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