

Semi-open panel proposal for the conference:
Backsliding, Resilience, Renewal? Democracy in Eras of Transformation

October 5–7, 2026, University of Passau

Panel title

*Deliberative Democratic Innovations:
Challenges and Opportunities from a Constitutional Perspective*

Panel abstract

Deliberative democratic innovations (e.g., lottocratic and open-democratic proposals, as well as sortition-based deliberative mini-publics) have become a prominent area of research within studies on democracy. These innovations are increasingly seen not only as sites for citizen participation and deliberation, but also, and more radically, as potential lawmaking bodies. From this perspective, most of the literature has focused on either the internal design and functioning of these innovations or their relationship with existing legislative institutions. However, surprisingly little attention has been paid to how these innovations can be integrated into the broader constitutional framework and, in particular, how they can be reconciled with classic constitutional principles such as bills of rights, rule of law, and separation of powers. This panel aims to investigate the compatibility of deliberative democratic innovations with these and similar features of a traditional system of checks and balances, such as bicameralism, federalism, and judicial review. The papers in the panel address this gap from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Paper titles and short abstracts

- “Deliberative Democratic Innovations & Political Accountability: An Interplay” by Neil Modi
This paper examines how the abstract concept of ‘political accountability’ is interpreted within representative democracy. Most obviously, such interpretation revolves around elections. By rooting theories of accountability within the law and its underlying tenets (e.g., protection of rights, separation of powers, and judicial review), this paper has two aims. First, it seeks to sharpen our understanding of political accountability. Second, it seeks to contrast such understanding with the way in which accountability has been operationalized under deliberative democratic innovations, assessing its implications for related concepts such as responsiveness and legitimacy.
- “Innovative Legislatures and the Saliency Bias” by Chiara Valsangiacomo-Balmelli
Landemore’s open-democratic and Guerrero’s lottocratic proposals, among others, aim to replace existing legislative assemblies with sortition-based minipublics. This paper

explores the assumption that redesigning the legislative branch of government is a panacea for current crisis of democracy. Why have political theorists started to focus so narrowly on legislative reform? Why not consider a broader, cross-cutting set of reforms affecting the executive, the judiciary, or even more specific areas such as political parties, election laws, rules of procedure or the bureaucracy?

- “The Mexican Judicial Reform in Theory and Practice” by Sonia Anaïd Cruz Dávila
The global phenomenon of democratic backsliding has given rise to different reactions. Whereas constitutional theorists warn against eliminating classic liberal institutions such as an independent judiciary, democratic theorists show enthusiasm for deliberative democratic innovations that, at times, are dismissive of counter-majoritarian mechanisms such as judicial review. This paper takes the case of the Mexican judicial reform as an example of what can go wrong when politicians fail to see the democratic importance of traditional checks and balances on majoritarian rule.

We invite two more paper applications for our semi-open panel.

About the panelists

- Neil Modi is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Ottawa within the Trans-Atlantic Platform project “Open Constitutional Democracy.” His primary research interests revolve around constitutional and legal theory, comparative law, and human rights law, with a particular focus on the constitutional law of India. Neil holds an S.J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center, an LL.M. from the University of Virginia School of Law, and a dual-degree B.L.S./LL.B. from the University of Mumbai. He completed his doctoral dissertation which studied certain comparative facets of transformative constitutionalism from the perspective of India, South Africa, and Sri Lanka.
- Chiara Valsangiacomo-Balmelli is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Lausanne within the Trans-Atlantic Platform project “Open Constitutional Democracy.” Her research interests include political philosophy, normative democratic theory, democratic innovations, and alternative legislatures, as well as theories of political representation and sortition. Chiara holds a PhD in Political Science and an MA/BA of Arts in Social Sciences from the University of Zurich. She has held visiting positions at the University of Konstanz and University College Dublin.
- Sonia Anaïd Cruz Dávila is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Warwick within the Trans-Atlantic Platform project “Open Constitutional Democracy.” She holds a PhD in law from King’s College London, a master’s degree in analytic philosophy from the Universitat de Barcelona, Spain, and a bachelor’s degree in philosophy from the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Mexico. She was previously a postdoctoral researcher at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Crime, Security & Law, in Germany. Sonia’s research interests lie at the intersection of constitutional, democratic, and legal theory, as well as moral and political philosophy.