



KEY RESULTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

“DEMOCRACY UNDER ATTACK”

Panellists: Carsten Holtkamp (Kreab Germany, DE), Anna Lührmann (Federal Foreign Office, DE), Petra Schleiter (St. Hilda’s College, University of Oxford, GB), Lora Viola (Freie Universität Berlin, DE), Alexander Betts (Moderation) (Brasenose College, University of Oxford, GB)

Democracy faces serious global challenges, including a rise in authoritarian nationalism, democratic backsliding, and widespread disinformation. These issues are evident worldwide, from rightward shifts in the US to the rise of populism in Italy and the Netherlands. Politically motivated groups are exploiting shifts in information consumption, using divisive issues like immigration and the reach of powerful social media platforms to deepen divides and influence public opinion. Democratic erosion often progresses gradually through legal mechanisms and existing institutions, making it difficult to recognise and counter.

Strengthening democratic resilience requires cross-sector collaboration among researchers, policymakers, business leaders, and the public. Companies can play a crucial role by fostering democratic values internally and publicly supporting democratic principles. Universities can contribute valuable insights into the rise of populism and help counter disinformation through direct public engagement. While AI can be used to spread targeted false content, it also offers powerful tools for detecting and debunking misinformation before it takes hold. Encouragingly, most citizens in democratic societies remain deeply committed to democratic values, as demonstrated by their readiness to protest when they perceive an immediate threat to democracy.

THE EXPERT PANEL ARTICULATES THE FOLLOWING CALLS TO ACTION:

Recognise the signs of gradual democratic erosion.

1 — Understand that democratic backsliding often occurs gradually through established institutions and legal processes. Avoid denialism by remaining alert to these incremental shifts.

Strengthen communication to counter disinformation.

2 — Implement digital literacy programmes and other strategies to help citizens critically assess information sources.

Leverage advanced technology to combat disinformation.

3 — Use AI to detect and debunk false information in real time.

Encourage direct connections between researchers and the public.

4 — Build trust in expertise by fostering open exchanges between academics and the public, while avoiding perceptions of paternalism.

Engage and educate the younger generation.

5 — Offer digital literacy education and confidence-building initiatives to engage young people, who are showing greater susceptibility to anti-democratic movements.

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2024



This event is supported by BUA, SCRIPTS, and the University of Oxford. It is assembled in the framework of the Falling Walls Science Summit 2024 in Berlin. The Falling Walls Science Summit is a leading international, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral forum for scientific breakthroughs. It commemorates the fall of the Berlin Wall and aims to promote dialogue between science and society.

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