



Democracy in America?

Re-Reading Alexis de
Toqueville

Panel Discussion

02. April 2025

16.00 - 19.00

Werner Gephart
Ulrike Müßig
Greta Olson
Jacques Commaille
Matthias Herdegen
Candice Kerestan
Hamadi Redissi
Richard Münch

Zoomlink



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CRISIS ANALYSIS
ÉMILE DURKHEIM
RESEARCH UNIT

Panel Discussion

Democracy in America? Re-Reading Alexis de Tocqueville

Organized and hosted by the Émile-Durkheim Research Unit: Crisis Analysis

The panel discussion will take place on **Wednesday, April 2, 2025, from 4:00 PM to 7:00 PM** (CET). You can join the event via the following link:

<https://uni-bonn.zoom-x.de/j/64492268419?pwd=0iUWldSViXeKtw56MXMm5ebPCPkGqw.1>

Meeting-ID: 644 9226 8419 / Code: 767919

On the topic:

After the globally attention-grabbing speech by Vice President J.D. Vance at the Munich Security Conference and the approving endorsement by President Trump, a number of unresolved questions arise for academic observers:

How is it possible that the alleged weakening of democracy in European societies, through the supposed erosion of freedom of speech, is seen as a greater danger than Russia's military aggression under Putin, which aims to restore imperial power?

And how is it conceivable that this complete miscalculation comes from a political camp that ennobles the storming of the Capitol - the symbol of American democracy - through a subsequent collective pardon of the perpetrators?

How can the administration's actions be understood, not only publicly criticizing judges but also making massive interventions in the judicial system, while ideologically placing the president above the law?

In Old Europe, we recognize this as a hallmark of absolutist rule. But how can all of this be reconciled with the observations and insights of Alexis de Tocqueville, who studied the particular sociological reasons behind *Démocratie en Amérique*?

Therefore, a re-reading of this great classic of political science and sociology seems worthwhile, in order to better understand today's contradictions and misunderstandings in the

interpretation of democracy, which are currently calling into question long-established transatlantic relations – as an expression of a global crisis of this form of domination.

To address these questions, we invite you to a panel discussion with renowned international guests. We would be delighted to welcome you to this event.

Participants:

+ **Werner Gephart:**

Introduction: Re-Reading Alexis de Tocqueville

(Sociologist, Legal Scholar, Artist / Émile-Durkheim Research Unit: Crisis Analysis / University of Bonn)

+ **Ulrike Müßig:**

A Look at Tocqueville's America from the Perspective of Legal History

(Legal Historian / University of Passau)

+ **Greta Olson:**

Diversity and Participation

(Literature and Cultural Scholar / University of Gießen)

+ **Jacques Commaille:**

New Forms of Random-Democracy in France

(Social and Political Scientist / École Normale Supérieure Saclay, Paris)

+ **Matthias Herdegen:**

Law and Democracy

(International Law Scholar, University of Bonn)

+ **Christoph Möllers:**

Democracy and the Separation of Power

(Constitutional Law Scholar / Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin) (tbc)

+ **Candice Kerestan:**

The Viewpoint of a Member of the Democratic Party

(Political Scientist / Brussels, Virginia)

+ **Hamadi Redissi:**

Democracy vs. Autocratic Systems

(Political Scientist / Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights and Democracy, Tunis)

+ **Richard Münch:**

Observing American Democracy with Tocqueville

(Sociologist / Zeppelin University, Friedrichshafen)

Conclusion:

Tocqueville and Beyond – Do We Need New Categories to Understand American Society and Culture?