Trans-Atlantic Platform (T-AP) Call on
Democracy, Governance and Trust

Call Scope/Description

1. Context, scope, and principles of the call

This section outlines the context, basic scope, and principles of the call.

The world is facing exceptional social, economic, technological, environmental, and geopolitical challenges, including migration, climate change emergencies, energy crises, war, conflict, political extremism, erosion of democratic institutions, protest, violence, corruption and growing public distrust of governance and expertise. These affect not only the institutions of democratic government but also the wider structures and processes that make our societies work and hold together. The call on Democracy, Governance and Trust (DGT) seeks to understand specifically how democracy, governance, and trust are integral to the tackling of both short-term crises and long-term challenges and are themselves a focus of the discontent and disruption facing many societies. It will support research that develops diverse methodological, disciplinary, and cross-national perspectives in relation to these topics, their causes, and dynamics; and builds capacity to respond creatively to these challenges, thereby maximising opportunities to strengthen democracy, governance, and trust for the benefit of all in society.

The T-AP Call on Democracy, Governance and Trust (DGT) will aim to:

- Catalyze and support transnational research teams from countries on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond the North/South divide to advance key insights from Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) led research and interdisciplinary and trans-Atlantic research collaborations through strengthening existing partnerships and establishing new ones.
- Support outstanding, innovative, and interdisciplinary research proposals that contribute to the understanding of challenges and opportunities affecting democracy, governance, and trust, and/or test interventions or initiatives aimed at rebuilding democracy, governance and trust.
- Co-develop robust and resilient work programs with communities and key stakeholders, including local, regional, national, and international policy makers.
- Promote equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) through the composition of the research teams and the research environment, design, and implementation by, among others:
  - ➢ integrating diversity-related considerations into the design of the project (e.g., use gender or other identities as factors of analysis, or involve research participants from diverse or disadvantaged groups);
  - ➢ composing and recruiting diverse research teams;
  - ➢ offering quality training and mentoring for young researchers from disadvantaged groups;
  - ➢ ensuring research-related activities and decisions are conducted in inclusive ways.

2. Objectives

This section outlines the substantive objectives of the call, i.e., what the program of research is seeking to achieve.

The DGT call aims to deepen and widen our knowledge and understanding of opportunities, challenges, and crises relevant to democracy, governance and trust. The framing of this call recognizes that many disciplinary perspectives and methodologies may be brought to bear on these questions and that proposals are strengthened by inclusive and innovative collaborations across disciplinary and national boundaries. The call is specifically keen to identify how conditions for democracy, governance and trust to flourish can be maintained, fostered, rebuilt where needed and nurtured through a range of interventions and initiatives based on basic research and/or empirical evidence.

We invite interdisciplinary (understood here as the integration of information, data, techniques, tools, perspectives, methodologies, concepts, or theories from two or more disciplines or bodies of specialized knowledge) and innovative research proposals that promise advances in one or several of the following ways:

(i)   Improve and innovate our conceptualization and theorization of democracy, governance and trust.

(ii)   Address topics aimed at collective responses to global challenges for democracy, governance and trust.

(iii)   Empirically define and describe the opportunities, challenges and crises relevant to democracy, governance and trust from a historical, contemporary, or prospective perspective.

(iv)   Offer diverse methodological, disciplinary, and cross-national perspectives on these topics.

(v)   Study or test interventions (i.e., improving outcomes and making a difference) aimed at enhancing democratic processes, improving governance, and rebuilding trust in formal and informal political systems, economic structures, cultural associations, education and public institutions.

(vi)   Advance knowledge through co-developing work programs with communities, educators, and key stakeholders in civil society, education and government.

(vii)   Examine the role of digital media, tools, and technologies in eroding or strengthening democracy, governance and trust and the roles of education, cultural institutions and the law in shaping, facilitating and restraining this role of digital media.

These objectives aim to leverage expertise from SSH, and relevant related disciplines, to tackle prominent challenges facing societies today - making use of theoretical and empirical insights and recognizing the value of co-production and practice fostering initiatives and projects conducive to supporting democratic experimentations and experiences, governance improvements and trust.

3. Type of research that can be funded

The DGT call supports humanities and/or social sciences led interdisciplinary research focused on the challenges described below. We invite proposals that use all appropriate methodologies, whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. Proposals can explore one or a combination of the following: theoretical developments, qualitative and/or quantitative data, big data, survey, lab and field experiments, historiographical and interpretative traditions, cross-national and cross-regional data analyses, multi-level analysis, textual data mining, systematic reviews, meta-syntheses and meta-analyses, longitudinal surveys, case studies, ethnographic interviewing and observation, participatory collaborative inquiry strategies, cultural productions, and simulations. This list is not exhaustive and applicants can focus their work on other methodologies or approaches relevant to democracy, governance, and trust.

4. Overarching themes for democracy, governance and trust

This call focuses on outstanding, innovative, and interdisciplinary research relating to the three components of the call - investigated ideally in combination.

Democracy	Governance	Trust
1. Concepts, understandings, and models of democracy, governance and trust 2. Education 3. Media, information, and communication 4. Economies and economic systems 5. Identities, discrimination, marginalization, and inequalities 6. Ecosystems and environments 7. Epistemologies, knowledge, and expertise 8. History and culture 9. Power, authority, and conflict		

The DGT call will focus on areas derived from the following nine cross-cutting themes of democracy, governance and trust. The focus on these themes will encourage research teams to develop innovative and outstanding interdisciplinary research proposals. It is also envisaged that proposals will potentially consider linkages between these themes as well as develop, and add to, their analysis in ways that explore the past and contemporary factors shaping democracy, governance and trust. Approaches may focus on dynamics, processes, contexts, and the making of meaning in relation to each of these. Historical inquiry

into those factors that help us understand the present and the future are also welcome. The descriptions below of the nine cross-cutting themes indicate potential areas for investigation.

Overview of cross-cutting themes for investigation of democracy, governance and trust

> **1. Concepts, understandings, and models of democracy, governance and trust**
>
> **2. Education**
>
> **3. Media, information, and communication**
>
> **4. Economies and economic systems**
>
> **5. Identities, discrimination, marginalization, and inequalities**
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> **6. Ecosystems and environments**
>
> **7. Epistemologies, knowledge, and expertise**
>
> **8. History and culture**
>
> **9. Power, authority, and conflict**

4.1.   Concepts, understandings, and models of democracy, governance and trust

Context: Researchers have explored and analysed democracy, governance and trust from many analytical and empirical approaches. Political structures are undergoing poly-crises and it has been claimed that governance is in a state of crisis, facing many 'wicked' policy problems, and that democratic norms and legitimacy are being eroded or suffering from 'backsliding'. Some argue that trust is increasingly polarised among social groups and linked to ethnic, cultural, and place-based identities and resentments. Fragmentation of ideas and identities challenges how democracy can represent large varieties of groups and diverse interests. Governance may be captured by interest groups and broad-based trust in how the fair distribution of wealth and resources may be weakened. New forms of democracies are emerging which challenge the concept and premises of democratic choices and pluralism. Repeated pressures to tackle major crises (e.g., climate change, Covid-19, wars, criminal and gendered violence, geopolitical instabilities) weaken trust in the ability of democratic processes to provide solutions. If external pressures on democratic institutions are growing, internal criticisms against forms of bad or poor governance (e.g., corruption, short-termism, polarization) are also increasingly made against democratic and political institutions. New forms and expressions of distrust in social groups and resistance against public, cultural and economic powers are developing.

Questions that could be considered[1]: What are the pre-requisites and co-requisites for democracy, governance, or trust to flourish in situations of heightened economic scarcity, extreme cultural divisions/oppressions and reduced political legitimacy? How different is this from past democracy, governance and trust crises? How should we analyse the challenges of governance, democracy, and trust in/facing "the" modern world? How do we understand, measure, and operationalize these broad

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[1] Please note these questions are examples and don't claim to be exhaustive. Applicants are invited to explore different questions related to democracy, governance and trust in their research projects if they wish.

concepts? What are the difficulties facing contemporary governance? How do violent social movements challenge democratic institutions at macro to micro levels? Does trust vary by political, social, geographical, or cultural contexts? What accounts for stark differences in levels of trust within and across populations and geographical areas? How do digital technologies and social media challenge the functioning of democratic governments and what is their role building or eroding trust? What are the different sorts of personal, community, and institutional trust relevant to democracy and governance? What are the drivers of trust in polarised or fragmented societies? What is the role and impact of social, cultural, political, and legal norms? How should we understand the concepts and meaning(s) of democracy, governance and trust and their relation to practice at macro, meso and micro levels? How can we analyse the concept of and the challenges to democracy in historical perspectives – including links to electoral democracy, political accountability, protection of minority interests, identities and perspectives, equitable access to and through democracy, and the development of democratic cultures and institutions? Does 'illiberal democracy' exist or is it a contradiction in itself?

4.2. Education

Context: There is a greater access to education both in the Global South and in the Global North. Similarly, the growth of opportunities for non-formal education and popular education across the globe has significantly contributed towards participation, empowerment, economic growth, and societal transformation. In all countries, to varying degrees, access to education is highly gendered and/or is a focus of social and political cleavages, conflict, and inequalities. Education can impact the orientation of individuals towards democracy, governance and trust.

Questions that could be considered: What role do accessible and equitable education and education systems play in democracy? Does education contribute to social and economic equality? How does education equip people for participatory governance, inclusive justice, and peace-building processes designed to rebuild trust and address severe social problems, such as intergroup or systemic conflict, ecological harm/crisis, and the development of inclusive social expectations and behavioural norms? How does digitalized and in-person education build collective capabilities to handle social conflicts in ways that nurture trust, ensure democracy, and transform or use governance mechanisms effectively?

4.3. Media, information, and communication

Context: The circuits of communication established by mass media are crucial components in a democratic society, as is transparency of the levers of control of information. At the same time, information (and misinformation) overload may erode trust and impact the quality of governance. There is increasing interest in how digital technologies are changing how governments operate, the effects of inequalities in access to digital technologies, and the effects of social media on aspects of political participation (e.g., voting behaviour, election campaigns in the past and present).

Questions that could be considered: How can participants evaluate the facticity of statements and reliability of sources? What is the link with "truth"? Do non-truths undermine the principles on which democracy is built, and within which parameters? Should we worry about misinformation? What role do governments – and other groups, institutions, and networks – have in addressing misinformation and regulating different sources of information? How are new technologies (e.g., advances in Artificial Intelligence) enabling new ways of tackling misinformation and improving information credibility?

4.4.   Economies and economic systems

Context: Globalization in its various forms is having a transformative impact on democracy, governance and trust. Shocks to the global economy (such as Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine) have impacted democratic politics in many countries, while the global governance of economic systems has come under scrutiny due to inflationary pressures and interconnected supply chains. Across many economies, processes of deindustrialisation have transformed societies, generating challenges to social and economic governance and in some places fuelling 'geographies of discontent'. Changing patterns of work, characterized by greater informality and precarity, along with increased interest in community-based models of economy, present new challenges, as well as certain opportunities for governance. Individuals, particularly workers, in many economies are entering into new and more precarious economic relationships. Similarly, the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated longstanding inequalities in vulnerability to economic and health risks within populations.

Questions that could be considered: How may democratic processes and governance institutions enhance social-economic equity for all, and vice versa? How do globalization and shocks from the global economy impact governance, democracy and trust? What are the consequences for societies of the greater precarity and informality of workforces? What is the relationship between the 'underground economy' and deviant and non-deviant forms of social and economic behaviour?

4.5.   Identities, discrimination, marginalization, and inequalities

Context: Changes in communication and patterns of movement and migration, whether free or enforced, can present a challenge to existing social, cultural, and political identities. The social identity, status and treatment of different groups has significant relevance to democracy, governance and trust. Essential foundations of democracy and governance can come under pressure due to inter-group conflict, whether relating to competing identities, discrimination or marginalization of particular groups, or structural inequalities in society. Social trust and trust in institutions, as well as engagement in different aspects of democracy and governance, can result from immediate shocks to confidence or long-term patterns of exclusion and inequality. Heightened awareness of cultural differences and similarities may also impact democracy, governance and trust. Societies are also increasingly recognising neurodiversity with consequences for governance practices in public and private spheres. Belonging and social identity may become less pre-defined by birth or socioeconomic position than in previous generations, with consequences for democratic processes, the coordination of collective action and feelings of trust towards

formal and non-formal actors. However, opportunities to develop one's identity and potential remain widely differentiated across groups and places.

Questions that could be considered: How does society allow for freer expressions of personal identity without adding to inequities in democracy and governance? How does a society establish and maintain a positive value to inclusion and access across identity markers of difference? How can solidarity, differences and dialogue be developed in a way that positively contribute to democracy, governance and trust? What measures of accountability and systemic change might help strengthen democratic processes, enhance governance and rebuild trust? How may digitalization reduce or exacerbate democratic marginalization, discrimination, and inequalities, and what alternatives can encourage inclusion? How can we make digital technologies more inclusive and a driver towards democracy, governance, and societal trust?

4.6. Ecosystems and environments

Context: Modernity is characterized by growing technological, innovation, competitive, political, and social pressures. Those pressures can push individuals, organizations, and states towards collaboration and cooperation, or towards conflict and competition. The complexity and uncertainty of the modern world can turn us to dyadic and triadic forms of cooperation and encourage conceptualization of governance focused on ecosystems and environments – as complex adaptive arrangements of actors and institutions. No matter what type of ecosystem is considered (ecological-biological, business, knowledge, entrepreneurship, innovation, education, platform, service, etc.), under what conditions may one observe strengthening of interpersonal, inter-community, inter-organizational, international relationships, and cooperatives? At the same time, climate change and ecological crises pose increasing challenges for many communities, national governments, and transnational governance. Frustration at the pace, commitment and effectiveness of governments, businesses, and other actors in tackling climate change can give rise to alienation and social protest, while distrust is a driver of climate change scepticism and conspiracy beliefs.

Questions that could be considered: How and why do democracy, governance and trust matter for questions of sustainability? What types of networks, contexts, or ecosystems might support inclusive, effective, and sustainable forms of democracy, governance and trust? What are the most significant environmental megatrends shaping (and shaped by) current and future trajectories of democracy, governance and trust?

4.7. Epistemologies, knowledge, and expertise

Context: The development of community-based and participatory approaches to research and knowledge in the past decades has challenged traditional academic research paradigms, created opportunities to recognize and celebrate different epistemological traditions and ways of knowing, and advanced new forms of social engagement, co-production, and research-led impact. Despite creatively engaging with different ontologies and epistemologies, the interplay between professional and grounded knowledge

and expertise still faces daunting challenges in addressing epistemic inequalities that underlay other structural injustices such as racism, gender discrimination, poverty, and marginalization. At the same time, different forms of expertise face threats from the manufacturing of disinformation and malevolent actors, undermining democratic processes and governance practices, and eroding trust in experts.

Questions that could be considered: How can dialogue between differing epistemologies and (non) Western ways of knowing contribute to strengthening democratic cultures, institutions, and values, widening opportunities for participatory democracy, while critically addressing anti-democratic practices and institutions? What are the indigenous perspectives and practices on democracy, governance and trust and how have they evolved over time? What theoretical and practical lessons can Western democracies learn from them, and vice versa? How can technology help us trace and make sense of those changes? How can action-oriented approaches to research help widen participation in democratic systems to facilitate mechanisms that increase transparency and trust? Whose knowledge counts and whose voices are heard in contemporary debates about social justice, governance, democracy, and change? How does epistemic justice impact democracy, governance and trust?

4.8. History and culture

Context: Democracy can be argued to be performed in an iterative sense, through historical sequences or processes and representing particular cultural forms or meanings. Refreshed historical perspectives and interpretive approaches can thus enhance our understanding of democracy, governance and trust, as well as help to envision and shape new futures.

Questions that could be considered: What are the cultural legacies embedded in principles and practices of democratic governments? How do commemorations and traditions enhance or foreclose inclusion? What are the historical points of inflection and influence that can be studied as models for fuller participation in democracies around the world? What is the role of cultural production in creating new senses of community, belonging, commitment to the governmental enterprise, or alternatively expressing protest and resistance? How does the 'rehearsing' of behaviours in the cultural realm make its mark in the political? What are the legacies of colonialism for democracy, governance and trust? How does domination and/or conflict in the past shape the present?

4.9. Power, authority, and conflict

Context: Conflicts over power, resources, identity differences and status are part of social life: they can have many causes and can engage different actors. Escalated conflicts pose challenges to social, economic, and political institutions and even to the survival of societies, in particular when they become violent. Ethnic, religious, gender, class, and generational conflicts, among others, generate political mobilization around the definition and allocation of rights and access to power, resources, and status. The formal and informal exercise of authority can help shed insight on where power lies and its consequences for democracy, governance and trust.

Questions that could be considered: What are the available mechanisms, processes, and spaces for (local, national, and transnational) political institutions and democratic societies to deal with conflict? Under which conditions do 'democratic' institutions and processes undermine relationships based on trust by handling conflicts in inequitable or authoritarian ways? How do political institutions and democratic societies deal with political conflicts and social mobilizations non-violently and effectively? How do social conflicts and mobilizations undermine relations based on (personal, social, and institutional) trust and escalate to become violent? How can dynamics of power, authority and conflicts change to foster peaceful and democratic life and co-existence? What is the role for cultural institutions, education, and/or law and justice processes in facilitating peacebuilding, intergenerational justice, and conflict resolution?