

Call for Papers
Rebalancing Democracy and Capitalism:
A Critical Dialogue Conference

Conference Dates: September 16-18, 2025

Location: University of Pisa, Le Benedettine Conference Center, Piazza S. Paolo a Ripa D'Arno, 16, 56125 Pisa, Italy

The [Rebalance project](#) invites scholars to participate in an in-depth meeting at the University of Pisa, exploring the tensions and possibilities at the intersection of democracy and capitalism. The relationship between these two foundational systems is under increasing strain, as economic inequality, corporate influence, and democratic backsliding reshape political and economic landscapes worldwide. This conference seeks to foster a critical and constructive dialogue on how democratic principles can be preserved and strengthened in market economies.

Conference Theme

Processes of globalization, financialization, and de-regulation of markets have been accompanied by processes that weaken democracies and their governance models. Private paths to value creation have strengthened compared to state-based politics and supranational institutions. In this context of market-based capitalism, large companies seem to impact democracy in multiple ways: by interfering with regulatory actions, avoiding fair payment of taxes or marginalizing communities or infringing workers' and citizens' rights. At the same time, however, corporations also favour democratic development, through engagement with stakeholders (e.g., clients, suppliers, associations, civil society organizations), transfers of valuable knowledge, funding of improvements to the local context and strengthening of human capital. In whichever direction, the direct influence of companies on societies, democracies and democratic principles seems more powerful than ever. This workshop proposes to explore how corporations play a role in the current weakening of democracies or how they enhance democratic principles and lead the change toward democracy-conforming capitalism.

We welcome contributions from various research fields (e.g., management and organization studies, business ethics, economics, law, entrepreneurship, and sociology) and research methodologies (qualitative, quantitative, mixed, conceptual) exploring how corporations threaten democratic principles or enhance them. Policy-oriented contributions are also very welcome. Potential topics may include, but are not limited to:

Democratic institutions and the control of corporate behavior

- How can democratic institutions ensure that economic power remains within the constraints of the rule of law?
- What types of MNEs are most prone to human rights abuses, and how effective are normative regulations in preventing or mitigating these violations?

- Are there different regulatory politics in different policy domains?
- How are various projects to set mandatory standards for global value chains related to one another?

Corporations and the influence on regulation and democracy

- What is the role of business for democracy?
- How do multinational enterprises seek to shape regulatory frameworks?
- How are the current regulatory structures and processes leveraged by corporations to influence regulatory outputs?
- Under what conditions do MNEs push back against—or accept—stronger external oversight?
- Does exposure to corporate wrongdoing influence victims' voting behavior?
- Why do corporations choose to remain politically (in)active on social issues? How do they navigate the pressures of rising populist movements?

Corporations and the enhancement of democratic principles

- Does climate change alter the relationships between democracy and capitalism that prevailed in the 20th century?
- How do social enterprises and alternative organizations interpret democracy in practice? In what ways do they structure themselves to reflect democratic ideals?
- How do cross-sector partnerships succeed in empowering democracy?

Keynote Speakers

- **Anita Ramasastry**, Henry M. Jackson Professor of Law and the Director of the Sustainable International Development Graduate Program at the University of Washington School of Law.
- **Theo Jaekel**, Business and Human Rights Advisor, Senior Associate Shift Project
- **Jonathan Zeitlin**, Visiting Fellow, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies; Professor of Public Policy and Governance Emeritus in the Political Science Department at the University of Amsterdam.

Submission Guidelines

We invite abstracts of up to 500 words, outlining the research question, methodology, and key arguments. Submissions should be sent by **April 15, 2025**. Notifications of acceptance will be sent at the beginning of May 2025.

Submission: To submit your abstract use this [form](#) or write to info@rebalanceproject.org.

The Rebalance Best Paper Award for Impact

The Rebalance **Best Paper Award for Impact** is given to a research paper that presents the most innovative, groundbreaking, or original concept on the conference theme and that is able to spark significant impact for policy and/or practice. This award recognizes not only the

technical excellence of the work but also its potential to inspire new directions in policy making and business practice.

Conference Format

The conference will be highly interactive, featuring paper presentations, roundtable discussions, and ample time for debate and networking. It is designed to facilitate in-depth engagement, constructive critique, and interdisciplinary exchange.

A dedicated session will be organized for PhD students and early career scholars, providing them with feedback from senior academics, including members of the REBALANCE Conference Scientific Committee.

The Conference will also host the finalists of the **Open Contest for Businesses that Support Democracy**, targeting business organizations championing pro-democracy efforts.

Organizers

This workshop is hosted by the University of Pisa in collaboration with the Rebalance project.

Organizing Committee:

Elisa Giuliani, University of Pisa (elisa.giuliani@unipi.it); Giulia Rossello, University of Pisa (giulia.rossello@unipi.it); Verdiana Morreale, University of Pisa (verdiana.morreale@phd.unipi.it); Elena Assenza, University of Pisa (elenassenza@hotmail.it).

For inquiries, please contact info@rebalanceproject.org. We look forward to your contributions and an engaging discussion in Pisa!

Scientific Committee:

Tim Bartley (Stockholm University and Georgetown University); Flaviano Bianchini (Source International); Nadia Bernaz (Wageningen University); Andrew Crane (University of Bath); Elisa Giuliani (University of Pisa); Johanna Mair (Hertie School); Francesco Rullani (Ca' Foscari University of Venice); Olena Uvarova (NLU); Francesco Zirpoli (Ca' Foscari University of Venice).

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