

Panel Proposal for the
71st Annual GAAS Meeting

Siegen University

Panel Organizers:

Christian Lammert (FU Berlin) and Boris Vormann (Bard College Berlin)

Confirmed Speaker:

Dr. Julia Simon (Universität Bremen):

"Setting the record straight: Efforts by far-right mothers' groups to marginalize LGBTQI youth's experiences in public schools"

Archiving the Liberal Tradition in the United States?

Contestation, Erosion, and Preservation in an Era of Political Polarization

In recent years, scholars and the public alike have focused intently on the precarious state of liberal democracy in the United States. This panel seeks to explore the multidimensional challenges to liberal democracy in the U.S., particularly those stemming from far-right movements, the Republican Party's trajectory, and broader societal shifts. Our discussion will critically examine how these developments threaten the foundational principles of liberalism—equality, participatory democracy, and deliberation based on the enlightenment tradition of reasoning—and how the preservation of these ideals can be approached in a highly polarized environment.

The existing body of research has predominantly centered on the role of Donald Trump and his influence on the Republican Party's shift toward far-right authoritarianism. However, this focus has often been limited to national-level analyses of elections and institutional changes, overlooking the broader and more complex dynamics at play in various offline and online spaces. Our panel seeks to address this gap by delving into the more nuanced and interconnected forms of political contestation that extend beyond formal institutions and electoral politics.

This panel will contribute to the scholarly discourse by offering a more textured analysis of the current threats to liberal democracy in the U.S., moving beyond simplistic narratives centered around Trump and elections. By examining the epistemic challenges, the broader far-right influence, the role of the left, and strategies for the preservation of liberal democracy, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current political landscape and potential paths forward.

We invite contributions that speak to the following questions:

- How can (alternative) collections of experiences, memories, and knowledges of American liberal democracy be archived and accessed? How are they mobilized to engage with one another in research and, possibly in a more strategic fashion, with a view to political competition more broadly? How do they relate to the phenomenon of (asymmetric) polarization?
- How do far-right movements engage with archival materials to contest imageries and reshape national myths, narratives, and 'collective memory', also especially in the ongoing struggle over education in the US?
- In what ways are digital archives critical in capturing and preserving the activities, communications, and propaganda of far-right groups – and how do they also raise normative and methodological questions for research in terms of critically examining, but thereby also (re)publishing these materials?

Contributions both from more empirical and theoretical perspectives or focusing on questions of methods are welcome.