



HAMBURG POLITICAL SCIENCE SEMINAR SERIES – HPS³

INVITATION

Please be invited to the Hamburg Political Science Seminar Series - HPS³ in Summer Semester 2026.

The HPS Seminar Series features international speakers presenting cutting-edge research in all subfields of political science and political economy.

For further information about dates and speakers in SuSe 26 please refer to the [HPS³ Website](#).

We welcome on

Tuesday, June 02, 2026 17:15-18:45 CET in AP1 Room 108

[John S. Ahlquist](#) (University of California)

Title: Labor Unions are not the 'Bulwark of Democracy'

Abstract:

In the face of contemporary democratic backsliding, are labor unions the "bulwark of democracy" that some have claimed? We decompose this into two analytically distinct phases: prevention and resistance. Unions' traditional market, associational, and social power has declined to the point where their preventative influence is quite weak. As market and associational power has declined, institutional power is vulnerable, even where union membership remains high. We show that union density and coverage are uncorrelated with antidemocratic party vote shares in recent elections across the OECD. Examining 11 episodes of 21st Century democratic backsliding, we find no cases where existing labor unions were key players in resisting democratic erosion. In some instances, major unions were willing to capitulate to or even collaborate with increasingly undemocratic governments. Unions are not currently a reliable bulwark against backsliding, although they can and should be important parts of broader pro-democracy coalitions.

We invite everyone interested to attend! No prior registration needed!