

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

APPLICATIONS WELCOME!

For more than a decade, the future of democracy – and with it the role of the state – has been severely put into question, its crisis often claimed. In many countries, distrust in public institutions and elites are on the rise; among other things, this has resulted in the increasing support and electoral success of populist, nationalist, and authoritarian leaders, which demonstrates the level of alienation from basic democratic values, procedures, and institutions evident amongst the public. Against this backdrop, the legitimation and effectiveness of traditional parliamentary democracies and their institutions have come into question. But is democracy really too slow to respond to a state of crisis, too much built on consensus mechanisms, and too dependent on dominant media or pressure groups?

With this call, THE NEW INSTITUTE attends to both the current state of affairs and the future of democracy. We want to explore further how democracy can be reconfigured for the long term. Over the last centuries, democracy has been reinvented many times and taken different forms; it may now once again be time for a fundamental transformation to make democratic decision-making processes and the respective institutions fit for the future – more responsive to contexts, more equitable, and more sustainable. How can we strengthen democratic communities, encourage participation, and modernize democratic institutions? What structuring conditions must we consider when thinking about the democratization of existing political structures and configurations so that they are compatible with a commitment to equity and environmental protection? How can we envisage the future development of public participation, the form and legitimation of political institutions, and the efficacy of public action? What kind of social imaginaries could we develop for this domain?

At THE NEW INSTITUTE, we aim to bring together creative minds to work on these questions. We want to encourage sound reasoning and systemic analyses of the complexities, strengths and weaknesses, as well as relevant features of the quite diverse developments in present-day democracies. For this purpose, we are looking for groups of fellows with visionary ideas who would like to

pursue a comprehensive approach for a democratic overhaul collaboratively. Groups could be composed of academics just as political practitioners of any kind and may also already be working on a suitable project. During their fellowships, groups would also be given the opportunity to invite associates, for example, for workshops, lectures, expert inputs, or what is required for the progress of their project in accordance with our programme and vision. Above all, this means: We want everyone involved to share an intrinsic motivation compatible with our mission and values. Projects, in turn, should aim at opening pathways to viable solutions in one of these areas:

1. THE CONDITIONS FOR DEMOCRATIZATION

A political system is never independent of its socio-cultural and natural environments nor the economic mode of material reproduction. The form it takes is also shaped by the conditions it meets and the resources it draws upon – as well as the anticipation of how such factors might change. What should we expect from the future when thinking about the form that democracy could take? Is the call for the revitalization of the democratic nation-state nostalgic? Is strengthening centralized, transnational democratic configurations already an ideal of the past? How certain can we be about a digital democratic future, with some ecological tipping points possibly already reached? What democratic visions could be developed that cater to our collective capacity to bring about sustainable, emancipatory change without forfeiting resilience should the conditions drastically change.

Normative and institutional questions about what form democracy should take require close consideration of social analytical assessments of the world's state. How can we translate scientific facts and estimates of what to expect into solid social knowledge so that realistic and effective strategies for democratization become discernible? What primary and secondary social and political effects of climate change, such as environmental migration, just as the transition to renewable energies, will be formative for the political domain? Which democratic configuration is best suited to offset their potential for conflict and also turn them into an emancipatory force? Moreover, how can we delineate a credible path to get there and forestall fragmentation and resignation?

2. THE FUTURE OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Every political organization, even if it is not democratic, claims to represent the political community it governs. While the idea of a representative democratic government is to organize contestation within representative bodies, their ability to represent has itself become more and more contested.

Individualization of personal convictions, polarization, and the rise of issues that do not correspond to classical political cleavages have made the claim to political representation precarious. In addition, not all social groups are equally

represented in political settings, while electoral systems sometimes produce inflated parliaments or even ignore democratic majorities. Moreover, growing distrust in political representation and goal-oriented negotiations among and between political parties seems to weaken its reputation further.

All this indicates that we need a reflection on the organization of democratic representation. It invites approaches that combine the fundamental with the technical: Starting from basic principles like democratic equality, they have to connect issues of social identities with technical problems of the electoral procedure. How can established parties be reformed and develop connections to voters at a time when traditional avenues of mobilization are in decline? What institutional reforms are necessary to make the respective parties and parliaments more representative of voters? How could representation be innovatively combined with radical democratic mechanisms of enhanced participation beyond consultation? And how can we revitalize the eroding support bases of parties and movements committed to addressing the most pressing social, economic, ecological and political challenges of the 21st century?

3. ENHANCING DELIBERATION AND DECISION-MAKING

For democratic systems to thrive, it is vital to incorporate a wide variety of innovative forms of deliberation and active citizen participation. As the COVID-19-pandemic has illustrated, states of emergency seem to have an inherent tendency to strengthen the dominant political power. Moreover, they can considerably increase the vulnerability of liberal democracies to be exploited by their leadership and political authorities, sometimes acting in their personal interests. It is, therefore, urgent to develop new forms of institutionalized debating and advisory structures that are future-oriented, such as citizen assemblies, civic councils, and arenas for democratic contestation. Further, complex problems such as climate change and rising social inequality are characterized by a high degree of uncertainty and interdependence. Hence, questions arise as to how such advisory structures could be improved through innovative approaches to co-create new solutions to prevailing problems. What kind of experiments could be conducted to showcase new opportunities for institutional reflexivity and subsequent reforms? What is the role that AI and Big Data can play in this context? Where could collective and artificial intelligence meet?

Moreover, social media could also give rise to digitally mediated opportunities for institutionalizing participatory civil society solutions and creating new collectives, information technologies, and relevant data. This could take the form of, for example, hackathon-based knowledge communities that support parliamentary and governmental decision-making processes. What are the best ways to implement IT-based solutions to facilitate such interactive

deliberations and negotiations? What can be done to counteract social media's contribution to polarization and misinformation? What does it take to revitalize the virtues of accuracy and fairness in controversial debates? And what are the ways in which high-quality media can contribute to fact-based information policies? How can we institutionalize cross-sectoral political communication and mobilization to make an impact on the future well-being of our societies?

THE GROUP FELLOWSHIPS

To support our work in these areas, we ask groups of up to **four persons** from academia and beyond, for example, practitioners from political institutions, social movement activists or journalists and artists, to apply for joint fellowships for a collaborative project related to one of them. Groups may be formed across various backgrounds but must not necessarily. Groups with an existing project committed to the transfer to THE NEW INSTITUTE may also apply, just as newly formed groups with a joint project proposal. During their fellowships, groups will also have the possibility to propose to invite collaborators crucial for the success of their project. Group fellowships will be granted for **one year**, which may be renewed for one additional year, depending on the project and progress made. The starting date for these fellowships is in the **fall of 2022**.

WHAT DO WE OFFER?

Fellowships at THE NEW INSTITUTE include accommodation at our residence, the Warburg Ensemble. In addition, common meals, funds for research and travelling, as well as financial compensation intended to cover living costs during the stay in Hamburg will also be provided. This compensation takes the form of a stipend and respectively depends on the personal and professional situation of each group member. The costs of health insurance will also be subsidized. There will be additional financial and organizational support for those accompanied by their family. Fellows also receive access to offices, libraries, collaborative working environments, as well as to other resources, such as information technology and administrative services

WHAT DO WE EXPECT?

In this programme, we are looking for groups who identify with the Institute's overall mission and aspiration to contribute to social, economic and ecological transformation from the angle of democratic innovation and action. All group members should exhibit an intrinsic motivation to commit themselves to the TNI with their project. Group projects should reflect a systematic understanding of the TNI's areas of concern and their connection to each other while being clearly located within one of the three thematic areas of the programme. They should exhibit a comprehensive and visionary approach,

with the potential to delineate pathways for practical solutions. All involved should also have the ability to bring transformative ideas to TNI's work beyond their project. They are expected to establish collaborations with other fellows and the broader community at the Institute and beyond. Therefore, good knowledge of English is essential. Moreover, fellow groups will be resident at THE NEW INSTITUTE in Hamburg. They are expected to be physically present for the full term of their fellowship.

HOW TO APPLY?

Applications must be submitted to

programmes@thenew.institute

by the **4th of November 2021 (1 p.m. CET)**.

Each group member should submit an application that must contain the following:

- Joint summary of your group project (up to 300 characters, including spaces);
- Individual motivational cover letter (addressing what you can bring to and expect of a fellowship at THE NEW INSTITUTE; up to 5.000 characters, including spaces);
- CV (and, if applicable, publication list; max. of 8 pages; min. font size 11pt);
- Individual overview of most important pieces of work;
- Joint project description responding to one of the three thematic areas of the programme, clearly indicating which one (1), 2) or (3); up to 20,000 characters, including spaces; this could also include visual material);
- Joint work plan and timeline for the project (and, if applicable, potential guest collaborators);
- Clear indication of the other group members.

All documents must be submitted in English in a single PDF file.

Incomplete applications or applications not responding to the programme areas listed above will not be accepted.

SELECTION PROCESS

The application process is organized in two stages: the written applications and the interviews, which will be held on either of the days from the 13th to the 15th of December. In the selection of fellows, TNI will be supported by a panel consisting of established experts in the field. The results will be communicated shortly after the interviews. THE NEW INSTITUTE covers travel expenses and accommodation costs for the duration of the interviews.

Please note that a follow-up call for applications of fellow groups will open early in 2022 with respect to the academic year 2023-24. For other ways to become a fellow at the TNI and associated terms, please refer to our website:

<https://thenew.institute/en/what#fellowships>

If you have any questions on this call, the application process, or the programme, please contact:

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THE NEW INSTITUTE encourages diversity in the workplace. All qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, ethnic origin, gender identity/expression, age, religion, disability, sexual orientation or any other characteristic protected by law.