



Report on the International Conference “Business, Fascism, and the Erosion of Democracy”

Held at the Istituto Svizzero, Rome, 3 to 5 June 2026

From 3 to 5 June 2026, we had the pleasure of convening an international, interdisciplinary community of scholars in Rome for the conference “Business, Fascism, and the Erosion of Democracy”. The meeting brought together researchers who rarely share a room, around a question of pressing public importance: how business, concentrated economic power, and digital technology bear on the erosion of liberal democracy.

The conference was hosted at the Istituto Svizzero’s Villa Maraini, with a closing session at CONI and the Foro Italico, a setting whose history gave the discussions a resonance a conventional venue could not have offered. It was convened by Prof. Andreas Georg Scherer (University of Zurich), Prof. Guido Palazzo (University of Lausanne), and Prof. Eric Orts (Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania), and was generously supported by the University of Zurich, the [Zicklin Center for Governance & Business Ethics at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania](#), and a Scientific Grant from the [Swiss National Science Foundation](#) (SNSF).

<https://www.istitutosvizzero.it/conferenza/business-fascism-and-the-erosion-of-democracy/>

Over three days, distinguished and emerging scholars from business ethics, management and organization studies, political theory, sociology, and economics presented and debated work on corporate-state alliances, the political power of platform companies, experts and expertise, historical lessons from business involvement in interwar fascism, and the responsibilities of business under conditions of democratic backsliding. The program deliberately mixed senior scholars with early-career researchers, and the exchange across disciplines proved as valuable as the individual contributions.

The University of Zurich was strongly represented throughout. Beyond Prof. Scherer’s role as convenor, Dr. Sidhant Ritwick and Dr. Roman Gibel, both of the University of Zurich, joined as invited speakers and presented their research, reflecting the close involvement of the Chair in the initiative.

The conference has already planted the seeds for a lasting and growing research network. Several collective outputs are now taking shape, including special issues and papers at respected journals and an edited volume with a reputed academic publisher. The conversations continued at a follow-up workshop in Philadelphia in July 2026 and will be carried forward at the 2027 EGOS Colloquium in Liverpool.

We extend our warm thanks to the Istituto Svizzero for its hospitality, to the University of Zurich, the [Zicklin Center for Governance & Business Ethics at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania](#), and the Swiss National Science Foundation for its support, and to all the participants who brought such energy and collegial spirit to three days of demanding and generous discussion. We thank Silvia Agustoni for her tremendous support in making this event possible.



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The themes we examined in Rome have lost none of their urgency, and we look forward to carrying this work forward with the network the conference has brought together.

Dr. Siddhant Ritwick