



Samforsk

The Social Science Research Institute

Annual report

2024



Group picture of almost the entire Samforsk team

2024 Foreword

2024 was a productive year for the Social Science Research Institute, but also one marked by changes. While FutuDem came to a close, new research projects will continue to explore ways for democracy to thrive in the future. The latter half of the year brought about cheerful news, as our long-standing colleague Lauri Rapeli was granted a professorship. Another overarching

theme was international collaboration. Several scholars from Samforsk took part in researcher exchange opportunities, and the International advisory boards of FIRIPO and FutuDem convened in a joint meeting in Barcelona. This report offers you a closer look at our diverse activities during the previous year. Enjoy!

BAROMETERN

– online panel survey for Swedish-speaking Finns

Barometern – the Finland-Swedish citizen panel conducted seven surveys in 2024. All the surveys were carried out in collaboration with research projects or societal actors and covered topics such as the EU elections, the Swedish People's Party's participation in the government and leadership elections, the readership of Finland-Swedish magazines, and affective polarization. The Barometern project published its own research on the importance of language for public services in the Swedish-speaking Finland, and Barometern's studies received attention in national media (HBL, Svenska Yle). *Barometern consists of approximately 8,000 adult Swedish-speaking Finns living in Finland.*

The Finnish Research Infrastructure for Public Opinion, FIRIPO

Over 20 surveys were carried out within the FIRIPO infrastructure last year, most in collaboration with external researchers, showcasing the broader scholarly use of FIRIPO. The Citizens' opinion panel had a busy spring, conducting surveys on voting behaviour in the presidential and EU elections. In the autumn, a register update survey ensured up-to-date panelist information. Other survey themes included cryptocurrencies and climate attitudes. Within the Gen2 panel, two surveys with researchers from Helsinki and Tampere universities examined political and societal attitudes among minorities. The Politician panel explored democracy attitudes among policy-makers and recruited new members, increasing its size to 1500 respondents. Learn more at www.firipo.fi.

Who Will Defend Democracy?

The Elite-mass linkage in attitudes towards democratic principles

Professor Lauri Rapeli will lead the research project *Who Will Defend Democracy? The elite-mass linkage in attitudes towards democratic principles*, together with Dr. Inga Saikkonen. The project will focus on studying elected politicians' willingness to uphold democratic norms and principles, even if it conflicts with their own political interests. The study uses unique panel data from Finland and Sweden, as well as a comparative survey data of political candidates from European democracies. The project is funded by the Academy of Finland until the end of 2028. In addition to Rapeli and Saikkonen, Dr. Anton Brännlund works in the project as a postdoctoral researcher.

Språkbarometern (The Language Barometer)

Språkbarometern, launched by the Social Science Research Institute in 2004, monitors how bilingual municipalities in Finland uphold linguistic rights and services for minority languages (Swedish or Finnish). Conducted every four years, the 2024 barometer was a collaboration with the Ministry of Justice and the Association of Finnish Municipalities. It explored service in one's own language, language use, and language climate. Dr. Isak Vento led the study, and results will be published in a report in February 2025.

Can educational outcomes predict response in surveys?

The project, led by Kim Backström (Åbo Akademi University) and Hafsteinn Einarsson (University of Iceland), focuses on whether people's educational outcomes can predict how and if they respond in social surveys. The project is funded by the Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland.



FIRIPO
The Finnish Research Infrastructure
for Public Opinion

FutuDem

Shaping the Future of Deliberative Democracy

In 2019, the Future of Democracy (FutuDem) was chosen as a center of excellence at Åbo Akademi University. FutuDem's main goal was to test new deliberative and participatory models of democracy in practice, especially democratic deliberation. The center of excellence consisted of seven work packages, all being led by a senior researcher: Democracies at risk (Inga Saikkonen), Populism (Peter Söderlund), the role of civic literacy (Lauri Rapeli), Inequalities and political participation (Henrik Serup Christensen), The role of social media in societal polarization (Kim Strandberg), Participatory and deliberative democracy (Kaisa Herne), and the Future of Democracy (Kimmo Grönlund).

After the inaugural conference in 2019, the FutuDem team launched their research by organizing the project's first deliberative event, known as Turku Deliberates. This citizens' panel, which consisted of 171 participants, took place in mid-May 2020 and was held online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The topic of

discussion was the transport system in the city center. As an innovative feature in the growing field of deliberative mini-publics, Turku Deliberates also included local councilors deliberating alongside citizens in some small groups. The results of the deliberation showed increased citizen support for sustainable forms of transport in the city, confirming that the involvement of politicians did not distort the deliberative quality of discussions. Moreover, both citizens and politicians expressed support for the broader use of deliberative mini-publics in local policymaking.

In 2021, the center's funding period was extended until February 2024, allowing FutuDem to expand its research. The seven WP-leaders led various projects, including the Citizens' Panel on Freedom of Expression in February. This initiative, conducted in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Justice as part of the OECD Civic Space Scan of Finland, explored ways to protect individuals working in the public sphere from hate speech.



FutuDem's Director Kimmo Grönlund opening the Summer School in 2022. Expert hearings during the Citizens' Parliament 2023.



The Citizens' Parliament team.

Beyond deliberative events, FutuDem researchers investigated key themes related to the future of democracy, such as young people's democratic engagement, populism, political knowledge, and efficacy. In June 2022, FutuDem and FIRIPO co-hosted the Summer School in Deliberative Democracy and Public Opinion, where researchers and doctoral students engaged in discussions and attended keynote presentations by James Fishkin, Jane Suiter, and Graham Smith.

The year 2023 marked a milestone in FutuDem's history with the organization of its largest and first national deliberative event: the Citizens' Parliament. That November, 671 randomly selected Finns convened to deliberate on four citizen initiatives concerning fuel and drug policies. The event aimed to provide informed public perspectives to support decision-making in the Finnish Parliament while fostering understanding and empathy among participants. A key takeaway from FutuDem's work is that people from all segments of

society are eager to engage in democracy. This is evident from the three major deliberative events organized: the Citizens' Panel on Freedom of Expression, Turku Deliberates, and the Citizens' Parliament. In total, 871 individuals participated in deliberative events, with thousands more expressing interest.

Over the course of five years, the FutuDem community made a significant impact, publishing nearly 100 peer-reviewed articles, two election reports, and five scientific books. These achievements highlight FutuDem's vital role in advancing democratic research and fostering citizen engagement in Finland and beyond.

FUTUDEM
Center of Excellence in Public Opinion Research

Other News

STRONG - Implementing democratic innovations

In November 2024, the **Strategic Research Council (SRC)** granted funding to the research consortium STRONG. The consortium is a collaboration between Åbo Akademi University, Tampere University, Vaasa University and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. Samforsk coordinates the consortium, with **Professor Kimmo Grönlund** as its leader. The STRONG consortium sets out to test whether democratic innovations, especially deliberative mini-publics, also known as citizens' panels, can improve both inclusion and trust in the democratic system, its institutions, actors and decisions. In collaboration with several relevant stakeholders on different levels of government, the project implements democratic innovations and studies their impact on participants, politicians and the public at large. STRONG is organized in six work packages. WP1 is responsible for the consortium management, WPs 2-5 engage in research, and WP6 is responsible for coordinating interaction. The STRONG consortium is part of the SRC program Democracy for the Future (DEMOC).

STRONG
Implementing Democratic Innovations



Pictures from the IAB meeting in Barcelona. On the left: Barcelona's beautiful skyline. On the right: IAB dinner.



International Advisory Board meeting in Barcelona

The steering groups and international advisors of The Center of Excellence in Public Opinion Research FutuDem and The FIRIPO Infrastructure convened in Barcelona on the 23-26 April 2024. During the two-day event, the steering board of FIRIPO and the work package leaders of FutuDem presented the activities of the two consortiums and discussed the way forward with the international advisors. What's more, we heard a presentation on the then-upcoming Catalan regional elections by **Dr. Jordi Muñoz**, the director of the Public Opinion Center of the Catalan Government (CEO) and a member of the IAB of FIRIPO. As a final act, PhD candidates **Kim Backström** (ÅAU), **Satu Metsälampi** (UTU) and **Albert Weckman** (ÅAU) gave presentations on their doctoral theses and how they have made use of FIRIPO resources in their research.

The Nordic Environmental Social Science Conference 2024

The 16th Nordic Environmental Social Science Conference (NESS2024), hosted by Åbo Akademi University and the University of Turku in June 2024, brought together over 300 scholars to explore interdisciplinary approaches to sustainability. **Professor Nina Tynkkynen** (Åbo Akademi University) chaired the Scientific Committee. The conference welcomed participants from various disciplines, featuring 25 workshops led by scholars from across the Nordic region and beyond. Among these, **Marina Lindell** and **Lauri Rapeli** (Samforsk) convened a workshop on the impact of deliberative citizens' assemblies on environmental governance and attitudes. The attendees also had the privilege to attend five keynote lectures, delivered by **Josie Chambers** (Utrecht), **Jasper Montana** (Oxford), **Markku Ollikainen** (Helsinki), **Mikaela Vasstrøm** (Agder) and **Christina Voigt** (Oslo).

Inga Saikkonen project leader in RESLIDE

Senior Lecturer **Inga Saikkonen** will lead a Work Package in the research consortium RESLIDE. The RESLIDE consortium is part of the SRC program Democracy for the Future (DEMOC). RESLIDE will evaluate the resilience of liberal democracy in Finland and propose solutions to safeguard it. This includes studying the commitment to democratic norms among citizens, politicians, and public administrators, exploring democratic discourses online and in formal political arenas, and analyzing inequalities in political representation and participation. Saikkonen's Work Package studies support for liberal democratic norms and institutions in Finland in comparison with other established European democracies and develops and tests a set of democracy information provision interventions designed to foster commitment to liberal democratic norms.

Doctor Hafsteinn Einarsson visited FIRIPO

The Finnish Research Infrastructure for Public Opinion hosted **Dr. Hafsteinn Einarsson** (University of Iceland) during his visit to Turku and Vaasa in September. Dr. Einarsson participated in a research seminar at Åbo Akademi University, presenting "Nonresponse and Non-Sampling Error Trends in Election Studies: Evidence from the Icelandic National Election Study 1983-2021." He provided valuable input on survey methodology, sampling, and weighting coefficients, which were of particular interest to FIRIPO scholars.

FIRIPO received an award for exemplary data management

The Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD) has issued its Data Management Award to FIRIPO for the excellent data management practices displayed by the research team working with the Citizens' Opinion and Barometer survey panels. The Award is issued to a person, research team or organization that has exhibited exemplary consideration for data management and the lifecycle of research data when collecting, organizing and archiving the data. FSD states that in the Citizens' Opinion and Barometer, data management and the lifecycle of data have been taken into account from the very beginning, the data is in good order and excellently documented.

Outgoing Scholars

Lauri Rapeli – University of Liverpool
Janette Huttunen – IPP-CSIC, Madrid
Jonas Schauman – TU Darmstadt
Kimmo Grönlund – Stanford University

The 33rd NORKOM - Nordic Local Government Conference

The 33rd Nordic Local Government Conference took place in Åbo in November 2024. Public Leadership at Åbo Akademi University stood as the organizer of the conference. 30 participants gathered in Åbo to take part in key-note presentations and in workshops, discussing topics addressing Nordic local government research.



Panel discussion during Europe Forum

Europe Forum 2024

Researchers from Samforsk took part in Europe Forum in late August 2024. The theme of the 2024 Europe Forum was Europe's Secure Future. **Inga Saikkonen** served as the coordinator for Åbo Akademi University's participation. ÅAU organized the Swedish-language discussion *Förändringar i den nordiska säkerheten* (Changes in Nordic Security), where **Albert Weckman** was one of the panelists. Saikkonen moderated the discussion European Parliamentary Elections and the Future of European Security and also organized the session EU's Green Deal Amidst Evolving Security Landscapes.

Research Director Lauri Rapeli granted professorship

After external evaluation, Samforsk's Research Director, **Lauri Rapeli**, was granted a professorship in political science. Professor Rapeli will continue to play a vital role in Samforsk's research activities. Congratulations Lauri!

Select Publications

Journal articles and other refereed publications

Brännlund, A., & Rapeli, L. (2024). Who's Afraid of Cryptoization? Evidence from a survey experiment in Finland. *Review of International Political Economy*, 1-24.

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Lindholm, A., Rapeli, L., & von Schoultz, Å. (2024). Does it pay to think about the future? Future orientation, ideology, age and vote earning among political candidates. *International Political Science Review*, 45:3, 406–422.

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The Samforsk team

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Find out more

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