

Samforsk

The Social Science Research Institute

Annual report

2025



Åbo Akademi
University



FIRIPO
The Finnish Research Infrastructure
for Public Opinion

STRONG
Implementing Democratic Innovations

Researchers from Samforsk visited colleagues around the world



STRONG organized it's first SAB-meeting in Berlin



Foreword 2025

2025 was a year marked by new beginnings at Samforsk. Our researchers were leading and participating in new, large-scale research projects such as STRONG - Implementing Democratic Innovations and RESLIDE – The Resilience of Liberal Democracy in Finland, that are part of the DEMOC – Democracy for the future program funded by the Strategic Research Council of Finland. Moreover, five new colleagues joined the fray at

Samforsk, assuming different roles and strengthening our position as a center of high-quality social science research. Even amidst turbulent times at Åbo Akademi university, researchers at Samforsk were once again efficient in their work, resulting not only in a great deal of scientific publications, but also in various activities involving the public, media and other stakeholders. In this report, we would like to offer a more detailed look at our year. Enjoy!



FIRIPO conducted over 20 surveys in 2025

BAROMETERN

– online survey panel for Swedish-speaking Finns

The Swedish Cultural Foundation in Finland has granted Barometern – the online survey panel for Swedish speaking Finns – a contribution of 100,000 euros for a project to recruit new participants and to develop a competence center for opinion research in Swedish speaking Finland. We want to extend our sincere thanks to the Swedish Cultural Foundation for the grant and look forward to continuing the exciting work with opinion research in Swedish speaking Finland.

The Finnish Research Infrastructure for Public Opinion, FIRIPO

2025 was a busy year for the Finnish Research Infrastructure for Public Opinion, FIRIPO. Researchers from Åbo Akademi and other institutions alike carried out around 25 survey projects via the FIRIPO panels. The depositing of data from older survey projects in **the Finnish Social Science Data Archive** went on as planned, and a number of new data sets from the Citizens' Opinion, Barometern, Politician panel and Gen 2 panel were published for open, scientific use, and are available via the Aila portal at FSD's website.

Who Will Defend Democracy?

The Elite-mass linkage in attitudes towards democratic principles

Professor Lauri Rapeli leads the research project *Who Will Defend Democracy? The elite-mass linkage in attitudes towards democratic principles*, together with Dr. Inga Saikkonen and Dr. Anton Brännlund. The project studies elected politicians' commitment to democratic norms and principles by using rare panel data from Finland and Sweden. In 2025, the team prepared several manuscripts and gathered more data for forthcoming analyses. The project is funded by the Academy of Finland until the end of 2028.

The Journalist Panel

A new survey panel consisting of Finnish journalists was established within the FIRIPO infrastructure in late 2025. **The Journalist Panel** has been planned in conjunction with the Union of Journalists in Finland and the Finnish Association for Media and Communications Studies. The panel is currently recruiting new respondents and will open its services to scholars of social science and communications during 2026. The principal investigator of the Journalist Panel is **senior lecturer Klas Backholm**.

New research staff

Samforsk welcomed five new members in 2025. **Dr. Maarika Kujanen** and **Dr. Johanna Holm** are both employed as Project Researchers, with Maarika working in Inga Saikkonen's RESLIDE work package and Johanna in Marina Lindell's STRONG work package. **Project assistants Selma Kaarakainen, Julia Rintala and Julia Kultti** have all started working in the FIRIPO-community. Selma and Julia R do data analytics for the Citizens' Opinion, Gen2-panel, Politician panel and Barometern, while Julia K is mainly working with the newly founded Journalist panel.



FIRIPO
The Finnish Research Infrastructure
for Public Opinion

Democracy for the future

Democratic governance is a cornerstone of human freedom and prosperity. Yet today, democracy faces mounting threats. The very norms that uphold democratic systems are being challenged, sometimes by the leaders entrusted to protect them. At the same time, public confidence has weakened, with many citizens expressing disappointment in how democracy functions and even questioning whether it remains the best possible political system.

These challenges raise urgent questions: What should Finland do to strengthen and protect democracy, both at home and internationally? And how should democratic decision-making respond when existing systems face fundamental challenges? These guiding questions lie at the heart of the **Democracy for the Future (DEMOC) program**, a strategic research program seeking to understand and reinforce the foundations of democratic society. Funded by the Strategic Research Council, DEMOC develops research-based solutions to secure the continuity and resilience of democracy in Finland. Through five complementary research consortia, the program generates new insights and practical approaches to enhance inclusiveness and promote a democracy grounded in citizens' rights, freedoms, and pluralism. It also addresses rising polarization and other risks that threaten democratic stability. Two of DEMOC's five consortia are connected to the Social Science Research Institute: **STRONG – Implementing Democratic Innovations** and **The Resilience of Liberal Democracy in Finland (RESLIDE)**.

STRONG – Implementing Democratic Innovations is a research consortium led by the Social Science Research Institute at Åbo Akademi University, with Tampere University, the University of Vaasa and the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare as partners. The consortium consists of six work packages and is led by **Professor Kimmo Grönlund** (ÅAU). STRONG focuses on how democratic innovations,

The DEMOC-program's research consortiums

- Reducing polarization via material participation (MaterialDemocracy)
- Overcoming Barriers to Democratic Participation with Minoritized and Marginalized Groups (OBaMa)
- Institutionalizing Democratic Innovations (STRONG)
- The resilience of liberal democracy in Finland (RESLIDE)
- AI for Reinforcing Democracy (AIDEMOC)

especially deliberative mini-publics, can be effectively implemented to improve inclusion, enhance citizen participation, and strengthen democracy in Finland. By examining how new participatory tools can be successfully adopted within public institutions, the consortium provides practical methods and evidence-based models for more inclusive and responsive governance. The research is collaborative and multidisciplinary, bringing together political science, administrative science, public law, health systems research, anthropology, and key stakeholders involved in developing Finnish democracy. STRONG aims to spark a long-term process where institutionalized and inclusive mini-public models become part of decision-making at local, regional, and national levels.



Group picture from STRONG's kick off in February 2025



Inga Saikkonen leads RESLIDE's work package 3

The Resilience of Liberal Democracy in Finland (RESLIDE) consortium examines the resilience of liberal democracy in Finland and sets out to present remedies for how it can be safeguarded. The consortium is led by the University of Helsinki, with the University of Turku, Åbo Akademi University, the University of Eastern Finland and the Finnish Institute for International Affairs as partners. The consortium's primary objectives are to identify the key risks and indicators of liberal democratic regression, assess their potential implications, and develop measures to prevent such developments. At the Social Science Research Institute, Dr. **Inga Saikkonen** leads Work Package 3: Democratic resilience among citizens. WP3 focuses on citizens' support for liberal democratic norms and institutions, examining what strengthens or undermines this support. The work also explores the relationship between democracy information provision and commitment to liberal democratic norms.

In the coming years, the insights and tools developed within STRONG and RESLIDE will continue to inform policy development, guide democratic innovations, and support decision-makers in responding to emerging societal challenges. As part of the DEMOC program, their work ensures that research-based solutions remain at the core of efforts to safeguard and renew democracy in Finland.

Find out more about the projects on their websites!

STRONG: <https://www.strongdem.fi/>

RESLIDE: <https://www.reslide.fi/>

Other News

Guest Lecture

The Social Science Research Institute (Samforsk) and the European Studies -programme organized a Guest Lecture titled "The Danish EU Presidency and the current security situation in Europe" with the Ambassador of Denmark to Finland, **H.E. Jakob Nymann-Lindegren** on Thursday 6 November 2025.

Marina Lindell named Docent of the Year

In April, our **Academy Research Fellow Marina Lindell** was named "Docent of the Year 2025" (Årets docent 2025). In English, this title means she was recognized for her outstanding achievements as a docent (adjunct professor/ senior lecturer), a significant award within the Finnish academic community. In June, Marina Lindell was appointed as Samforsk's Deputy Director for the next three years.



Docent of the year Marina Lindell



STRONG's steering committee and Scientific Advisory Board members

Fika efter kunskap

For the seventh consecutive year, the series "Fika efter kunskap" offered popular science and knowledge-enhancing discussions featuring researchers and experts. The events have been organized in various formats, including breakfast and lunch discussions, short lectures, seminars, and after-work idea workshops. The sessions have been arranged in collaboration with partners engaged in current societal issues and with experts and researchers from multiple fields. Samforsk has been a collaborator throughout the duration of the series, and in 2025 the following topics were addressed:

- **Young People's Political Participation: How, Why, and Who** (with Dr Janette Huttunen)
- **We and the Others: Politics, Identity, and Emotions in Swedish-Speaking Finland** (with Dr Janne Berg)
- **Ostrobothnia as a Blue Zone: Research on Regional Differences in Longevity, Health, and Lifestyle** (with Dr Sarah Åkerman).

STRONG SAB-meeting

In late October, **STRONG** convened its first **Scientific Advisory Board (SAB)** meeting in Berlin. During the meeting, the team presented STRONG's research plan, Work Packages, and ongoing activities. The SAB members offered valuable insights and practical recommendations to help refine the approach and strengthen the project's impact. The meeting concluded with a thought-provoking panel discussion on the current state of democracy. While acknowledging signs of democratic backsliding, the SAB members expressed optimism, highlighting the younger generation's determination to safeguard democratic values and shape a better future. Thank you to the Scientific Advisory Board for your time and expertise!

The Vaasa Arts and Science Carnaval

The Vaasa Arts and Science Carnaval was arranged on 7–8 November 2025 in Vaasa. A panel discussion on the polarized societal and political climate was organized and moderated by Marina Lindell. Participants in the panel were **Professor Kim Strandberg**, **Dr Janne Berg** and **Dr Daniel Kawecki**.



Panel discussion during the Vaasa Arts and Science Carnaval

Research visits

- Dr. **Marina Lindell** visited the Centre for Democratic Futures at the University of Southampton for two weeks in October 2025. During the visit, an upcoming conjoint survey experiment was discussed, along with several exciting ideas for future cooperation. Professor Matthew Ryan and his team's expertise in democratic reform and participatory decision-making will be highly beneficial to several of our research projects.
- PhD student **Kim Backström** visited Mid Sweden University (Sweden) in June 2025.
- Professor **Alexandru Cernat** (University of Manchester) visited Samforsk 12–20 November.
- Professor **Kimmo Grönlund** visited the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in December 2025 and presented a paper on the Finnish Citizens' Parliament at their "Democracy, Elections and Citizenship" seminar series

New forum for transdisciplinary research

On 13 November 2025, a transdisciplinary conference, called Forum för finlandssvensk forskning, for researchers working on topics related to Swedish-speaking Finland was held in Turku. Nearly 40 researchers gathered to present their work and to build networks. **Marina Lindell** was one of the initiators and organizers of the conference together with **Eva-Lena Lundgren-Henriksson** (from Hanken), **Staffan Himmelroos** (from Univ. of Helsinki) and **Mats Wickström** (from ÅAU).

Europe Forum 2025

The annual Europe Forum was organized at the Turku city theatre on the 27–29 August 2025. As usual, Samforsk had a strong presence in the event, which gathers citizens, politicians and professionals to discuss the state of Europe.

In the Forum, Dr. **Inga Saikkonen** moderated a panel discussion on the topic "Europe in the New World Order", hosted by the research project RESLIDE, in which Saikkonen acts as a work package leader. Co-moderating the discussion was **Juha Jokela**, program director at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA), and the panel comprised of three professionals from the field: Senior researcher at FIIA **Sanna Salo**, Senior lecturer at the University of Eastern Finland **Kimmo Elo**, and **Imelda Maher**, who acts as Sutherland Full Professor in European Law at University College Dublin.

On the final day of the event, the research project STRONG hosted a panel discussion tackling the question "If USA turns its back – who will defend the Nordic countries and democracy?". The panel consisted of professor and leader of STRONG, **Kimmo Grönlund**, member of parliament **Eva Biaudet**, journalist at the Finnish broadcasting company **Maria Stenroos**, and doctoral researcher **Albert Weckman** from Samforsk. The discussion was moderated by **Vilppu Kuusipalo**, project coordinator for the FIRIPO infrastructure at Samforsk.

Pictures in the top right corner: STRONG's and RESLIDE's panel discussions at Europe Forum



Samforsk has moved in Åbo

For over 10 years, Samforsk has called the Åbo Akademi University's ASA Building its home. But now it's time for a change. The brand-new **Astra building** is finally complete and ready to welcome both staff and students with open doors. In January 2026, we packed our boxes, stretched our legs, and moved into shiny new offices in Astra. You'll find us on the third floor, come say hi and check out our new home!

Rachel Gibson promoted as honorary doctor

Professor Rachel Gibson from the University of Manchester was promoted as an honorary doctor in May 2025 at Åbo Akademi University. Rachel has worked closely with political scientists at ÅAU since 2006 and, for instance, acted as an international advisory member for The Finnish Research Infrastructure for Public Opinion FIRIPO and FutuDem.

Select Publications

Journal articles and other refereed publications

Backström, K., Cernat, A., Sirén, R., & Söderlund, P. (2025). Measurement error when surveying issue positions: a MultiTrait MultiError approach. *Political Science Research and Methods*.

Berg, J., Eklund, J., Lindell, M., & Strandberg, K. (2025). Vi och dem? En rapport om samhällspolariseringen i Svenskfinland. Institutet för samhällsforskning (Samforsk), Åbo Akademi.

Bernardi, L., Mattila, M., Papageorgiou, A., & Rapeli, L. (2025). Poor mental health does not always reduce political participation: Wrong assumption, wrong samples, or wrong measures? *Politics and the Life Sciences*, 44(2), 247-259.

Brännlund, A., Weckman, A., & Lundberg, P. (2025). Nuclear Weapons in the Post-Material Age: A Study on Resistance Against Nuclear Proliferation Using Data from Sweden. *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, 8(1), 192-213.

Christensen, H. S., & Saikkonen, I. A. L. (2025). Does democratic backsliding depend on the policy issue? Evidence from a conjoint experiment. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 1–24.

Goldberg, S., Lindell, M., Bächtiger, A. (2025). Empowered Minipublics for Democratic Renewal? Evidence from Three Conjoint Experiments in the United States, Ireland, and Finland. *American Political Science Review*, 119(3), 1393–1410.

Grönlund, K., Herne, K., Huttunen, J., Ikäheimo, H.-P., Jäske, M., & Lindell, M. (2025). Kansalaisparlamentti-kokeilu ja siitä saadut opit. Opas puntaroivan mielipidemittauksen järjestämiseen. Institutet för samhällsforskning (Samforsk), Åbo Akademi.

Gunko, R., Rapeli, L., Scheinin, M., Wikström, J., & Tynkkynen, N. (2025). Navigating Environmental Perceptions: Exploring the Impact of Political Orientation and Climate Change Beliefs on the Evaluation of the Local Environment. *Environmental Management*, 75(10), 2647-2658.

Gunko, R., Rapeli, L., Scheinin, M., & Karell, P. (2025). Does environmental quality play a role in determining housing prices in a coastal community? *Finnish journal of social research*, 1-14.

Herne, K., Grönlund, K., & Söderlund, P. (2025). Can Organized Deliberation Reduce Confirmation Bias? *The Journal of Deliberative Democracy*, 21(1), 1-14.

Hillo, J., Vento, I., & Erkkilä, T. (2025). Algorithmic governance: Experimental Evidence on Citizens' and Public Administrators' Legitimacy Perceptions of Automated DecisionMaking. *Public Administration*. Advance online publication.

Hillo, J., & Vento, I. (2025). Show me what you've got: a survey experiment of aid allocation dynamics under transparency and austerity mandates. *Policy Studies*, 1-27. Advance online publication.

Himmelroos, S., Sjöblom, S., & Vento, I. (2025). Language-based Welfare Services in Times of Structural Change: An Examination of Finland's Social and Healthcare Reform (2023). *Revista de Llengua i Dret - Journal of Language and Law*, 2025-December(84), 138-162.

Karv, T., & Strandberg, K. (2025). Only losers use excuses? Exploring the association between the winner-loser gap and referendum attitudes following a local referendum. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 35(1), 50-72.

Karv, T., Malmberg, F. G., & Saikkonen, I. (2025). Incumbency, Localness, or Accumulation? A Conjoint Experiment on Multiple-Mandate Holding. *Representation*, 1–20.

Kujanen, M. (2025). Performance, Person, or Institution? Explaining Presidential Popularity in Semi-Presidential Regimes. Doctoral dissertation. Tampere University.

Kujanen, M. & Raunio, T. (ed.) (2025). Presidentinvaalit 2024: Ehdokasvalinta, media ja kansansuosio. Tampere University Press.

Kujanen, M., & Sedelius, T. (2025). Calls for a strong president and support for autocracy: exploring semi-presidential regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. *East European Politics*, 1-20.

Kuokkanen, K., & Vento, I. (2025). The Cohesion Policy of the European Union as a driver of hybridity and projectification. In J. Vakkuri, J.-E. Johanson, R. Pinheiro, & T. Erkkilä (Eds.), *Public Policies for Hybrid Governance* (pp. 78-98). Edward Elgar.

Lindell, M., & Strandberg, K. (2025). The Deliberative Type? How Different Personalities Prefer and Experience Public Deliberation. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 48(2), Article e70008.

Lundmark, S., & Backström, K. (2025). Predicting Survey Nonresponse with Registry Data in Sweden between 1993 and 2023: Cohort Replacement or a Deteriorating Survey Climate? *Survey Research Methods*, 19(3), 247-265.

Rapeli, L. (2025). The Impact of Increased Learning Opportunities on Political Knowledge: Evidence from Repeated Cross-Sectional Surveys in Finland in 2008 and 2020. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 37(2), Article edaf016.

Hanna Reinikainen, Nils S. Borchers, Suuronen, A., & Strandberg, K. (2025). Lighting the participatory spark? The role of social media influencers in initiating political participation. *Nordicom Review*, 46(1), 25-54.

Tuominen, L. S., Wikström, M., Helanterä, H., Karell, P., Rapeli, L., Vuorisalo, T., & Brommer, J. E. (2025). Positive social relationships in hunting groups are related to compliance with the higher-level moose management. *Ecology and Society*, 30(4).

Vento, I., Hillo, J., & Sjöblom, S. (2025). Do public administrators overstate their support for good governance? Evidence from a list experiment in Finland. *International Public Management Journal*, 1-27. Advance online publication.

Värttö, M., Jäske, M., Herne, K., & Grönlund, K. (2025). The Development of Democratic Attitudes and Civic Virtues in a Deliberative Mini-Public. In T. Ahola, N. Tura, V. Ojanen, & A. Johansen (Eds.), *Citizen Participation in Sustainable Urban Development: A Framework for Engagement from the Nordics* (pp. 144-158). Routledge.

Weckman, A. (2025). En kritisk granskning av Sveriges säkerhetspolitiska vägval. *Kosmopolis*, 55(1-2).

Weckman, A. (2025). Wartime solidarity and sense of belonging to Europe: public support for military aid to NATO allies under attack. *European Security*, 1–20.

Find out more

For more information about Samforsk please visit our webpage at www.abo.fi/en/samforsk

Editors: Eva Aspñäs and Vilppu Kuusipalo

Graphic design: Eva Aspñäs and Peter Siegrifds

The Samforsk team

Kimmo Grönlund | Professor, Director

Lauri Rapeli | Professor

Marina Lindell | PhD, Academy Research Fellow, Deputy Director

Inga Saikkonen | PhD, Senior Lecturer

Janette Huttunen | PhD, Postdoctoral researcher

Vilppu Kuusipalo | MA, Project Coordinator FIRIPO

Kim Backström | PhD Candidate

Albert Weckman | PhD Candidate

Jonas Schauman | PhD Candidate, Project Assistant

Isak Vento | PhD, Postdoctoral researcher

Eva Aspñäs | MSc, Project Coordinator STRONG

William Erlands | Project Assistant

Jesper Eklund | PhD Candidate, Project Assistant

Anton Brännlund | PhD, Project researcher

Johanna Holm | PhD, Project researcher

Maarika Kujanen | PhD, Project researcher

Julia Rintala | Project Assistant

Selma Kaarakainen | Project Assistant

Julia Kultti | Project Assistant

Steering Committee

Kim Strandberg | Professor, Social Science

Edvard Johansson | Professor, Economics

Anna-Greta Nyström | Professor, Business Economics

Carsten Anckar | Professor, Social Science

Nina Tynkkynen | Professor, Environmental Governance and Policy

Kaisa Herne | Professor, Social Science



abo.fi/en/samforsk

Samforsk Åbo | Porthansgatan 3 | 20500 ÅBO | Samforsk Vasa | Strandgatan 2 | 65101 VASA