

**Call for Papers**  
**Pre-LSA 2026 Workshop on Law & Political Economy**

**Reconstructing State Capacity**

May 27, 2026  
Berkeley, California

**Deadline for paper abstracts: February 10, 2026**

We are pleased to announce a one-day workshop on *Reconstructing State Capacity*, to be held on May 27, 2026, at the University of California, Berkeley. The workshop will take place immediately prior to the Law and Society Association's 2026 Annual Meeting in San Francisco (May 28–31, 2026) and is organized by the LSA Law and Political Economy Collaborative Research Network (CRN 55), the LPE Collective, and the Global LPE Network in collaboration with the Berkeley Economy and Society Initiative.

**Workshop Theme**

In recent years, questions of state capacity have returned to the center of sociolegal and political economy scholarship. Across diverse contexts, the functions of the state have become increasingly contested and reworked. Governing capacity is expanded and intensified in some domains, while deliberately curtailed, dismantled, or redirected in others, often in ways that reflect shifting political coalitions, economic interests, and struggles over authority. Yet “state capacity” is frequently invoked as if it were a fixed or technical attribute, something states either possess or lack, rather than a politically contingent and historically produced achievement that must be continuously assembled and sustained.

This workshop starts from the premise that state capacity is shaped and contested through multiple, intersecting processes in which law plays a central mediating role. Legal rules, institutions, and vocabularies organize administrative power, structure enforcement, and reallocate authority across public and private actors. Through these processes, law legitimates coercion, withdrawal, or redistribution. At the same time, law is also a site through which state capacity is hollowed out, fragmented, selectively redeployed or strategically reconfigured to manage competing demands and institutional contradictions—often in ways that intensify inequality, shift risks onto households and communities, and entrench new forms of dependence and control.

We invite papers that examine state capacity as a relational phenomenon situated within law and political economy and produced through ongoing struggles among states, markets, and societies. Such struggles unfold across legal fields, spatial scales, and historical moments, generating uneven and often contradictory forms of governing capacity. Rather than treating the state as a unitary or coherent actor, the workshop encourages analyses that foreground the legal techniques, organizational practices, and social conflicts through which governing capacity is assembled, undermined, and reconfigured. We also welcome analyses of how states navigate and operationalize internal tensions—between market and plan, formal law and informal authority, domestic sovereignty and transnational integration—as productive dimensions of governance rather than failures of coherence.

## Topics of Interest

We welcome papers on a wide range of topics related to law, political economy, and state capacity, including but not limited to:

- Legal foundations and transformations of state capacity in different political economies
- Industrial policy, regulation, and the legal infrastructures of economic governance
- Privatization, outsourcing, and the deconstruction or redistribution of public authority
- State capacity, corporate power, and mechanisms of regulatory capture
- Law, coercion, and repression as instruments or dimensions of governing capacity
- State capacity and social provision, welfare, and redistribution
- Citizenship, migration control, and border governance
- Crisis governance, emergency powers, and forms of legal exceptionalism
- Comparative, transnational, and postcolonial perspectives on state capacity and its variation across time and space
- Non-Western modalities of state capacity, including hybrid forms that combine market governance with political monopoly, and the strategic appropriation of Western legal knowledge
- Tensions between state capacity and regime legitimacy, including how states manage contradictions between economic governance and political authority

## Submission Guidelines

We invite scholars to submit abstracts of no more than 300 words by **February 10, 2025**. Final papers should be between 3,000 and 4,000 words and will be precirculated among participants. Full drafts are due in early May. Submissions to the workshop will not count towards the LSA Annual Meeting presentation limits. Workshop participants do not need to register for the LSA Annual Meeting to attend this workshop. Abstracts should be submitted via the following link: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeq1z6S11cORvy5dS0FNamXeq6OJJ3NXsdZGGf9FU-MFmreYw/viewform>

We also welcome hearing from scholars interested in attending, facilitating, or otherwise supporting the workshop. There is no cost for participating in the workshop.

## Workshop Format

The workshop will consist of thematic sessions organized around pre-circulated papers. Each paper will receive dedicated discussion from assigned discussants and participants, with an emphasis on collective engagement rather than formal presentation. The format is designed to foster sustained, interdisciplinary conversation across sociolegal studies, political economy, economic sociology, and related fields. For questions, please contact the workshop organizers.

We look forward to receiving your submissions and to an engaged discussion in Berkeley!

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