



TRUTH AND AUTHORITY
CONFERENCE

CALL FOR PAPERS

**TRUTH AND
AUTHORITY IN
CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

23-24 OCTOBER 2025

MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF LAW



On 23 and 24 October 2025, the Maastricht Institute for Criminal Sciences will organise – in collaboration with partners within and outside the Faculty of Law of Maastricht University – a multidisciplinary two day-conference in Maastricht on “Truth and Authority in Criminal Justice”. The conference builds on the notion that – in both the popular and the scholarly debate – there is an increasing concern that we are living in the midst of a “post-truth” or “post-factual” society, which is essentially characterised by a particular distrust in public truth claims and in authority to be a legitimate public truth-teller. The goal of the conference is to explore how post-truth narratives and politics may influence and challenge criminal law.

The conference format will be a mixture of plenary keynote sessions and small panel sessions. Key note-speakers who already confirmed their participation include Prof. dr. Sabine Gless (Professor of Criminal Law and Procedure at the University of Basel School of Law, Switzerland) and Prof. dr. Sander van der Linden (Professor of Social Psychology in Society, Cambridge, United Kingdom). Other key note-presenters will be announced later.

We welcome abstracts and suggestions for panels related to the following four subthemes:

Conspiracy Theories and Crime

Conspiracy theories are widespread, including beliefs that an evil elite is trying to suppress citizens, anti-vaccination conspiracy theories, and the far-right “Great Replacement Theory”. One key feature of conspiracy theories is that they may stimulate crime and radical action, such as the arsoning of 5G telecommunication masts during the pandemic and the insurrection at the US Capitol. Conspiracy beliefs decrease people’s willingness to obey the law, undermine democratic institutions, and legitimize violence. Where should one draw the line between personal beliefs versus dangerous rhetoric? How should criminal policy and criminal law deal with online and offline conspiracy theories?

Technology as the authority in legal fact-finding

New technologies, such as AI-based systems (AIS), are increasingly used in investigating and adjudicating criminal liability. On one hand, AIS can be used to discover new evidence, and their outputs could enter the trial as a new type of scientific evidence. On the other hand, AIS are also acquiring a “truth-telling” function: for example, one could think of the use of AIS used by service providers to flag and remove illicit content on social media platforms. Thus, there are several issues which arise when new technology “enters” the criminal justice arena. Human beings, including trier of facts, are prone to trust blindly the outputs of technology, while AIS can also “hallucinate” and create alternative truths. Moreover, due to AIS’ inherent characteristics, human subjects might not be skilled (enough) to question the reliability of the systems’ outputs. Could this lead to considering AI evidence as the “absolute truth”? Should there be trust in AI generated evidence?



Criminalisation challenges in a post-truth society

When the public debate is affected by the spreading of fake news, how should criminal law respond to this post-truth phenomenon? Many will not doubt the need for criminalisation of false information that is apt to incite people to hatred or violence. But should we also criminalise other forms of potentially harmful misinformation, especially when this could lead to the silencing of 'unwanted' opinions? The notions of truth and fake news are often part of an illiberal practice to limit access to information and to penalize critical voices against the government. How to guarantee the protection of truth in our pluralistic society without unwarranted state censorship and without people losing the capacity to distinguish the authoritative and the authoritarian?

Truth & Authority and the International Legal Order

Distrust in public truth claims and skepticism towards authorities being legitimate public truth-tellers has implications beyond national jurisdictions and affects the international legal order. At a normative level, the universality of human rights is increasingly questioned, while the legitimacy of international institutions, such as courts, is under attack. Moreover, attempts to deal with the climate crisis are grossly hindered by a lack of scientific certainty and common resolve. We welcome reflections on the crisis of truth and authority that are grounded in the experience of trying to create an international legal order.

Submission of abstracts

Academic scholars, professionals, practitioners, and PhD-students from various academic disciplines (such as law, criminology, psychology, political science, international relations, sociology, anthropology and other relevant practice based fields) are encouraged to apply. The deadline for submissions of abstracts (max. 200 words) is due 28 February 2025. Please note that it is also possible to submit a proposal for a pre-arranged panel. The organisation committee will inform the applicants on 16 May 2025 ultimately whether their submission is accepted.

Click [here](#) to submit your abstract

There will be conference fees for participation; more information can be found on the registration form.

Note that after the conference a selection of papers will be published in a special issue of a journal and/or in an edited volume. All other contributions will be made available online.

More information about the programme and other relevant information will be disseminated in the Spring of 2025 on our website ([click here](#)) and through several social media channels.