

**The Politics of Contention Symposium:
Communication, Populism, and the Crisis of Democracy
March 1st-4th, 2018**

Democracies across Europe and the Americas are in crisis due to the rise of populism, spurred by the perceived lack of legitimacy of existing processes and institutions in the eyes of vast numbers of their citizens. For citizens to trust democratic processes they need to believe that institutions are responsive and treat them with fairness; that even when citizens disagree with one another, all are granted equal social standing; and that electoral winners will be just by keeping both structural and rule-based avenues intact for political minorities to participate and flourish.

Instead, many feel that institutions are more responsive to the needs of special interests than the concerns of the broad citizenry. Citizens have turned this critique into an attack on the principle that the State should provide for the social welfare in neoliberal economics. This crisis to democratic societies centers on the delegitimization of major social institutions. Much of this legitimization occurs in civil society: the layer of everyday life in which individuals encounter one another—in groups, communities, organizations, and workplaces—to build trust and mediate differences. Populism, the “deconstruction of the administrative state,” curtailed immigration, barriers for refugees, and intolerance for ethnic and racial minorities, has eroded civil society, democratic functioning, and the potential for public deliberation over social controversies.

In both the United States and Europe, core integrative mechanisms that once provided for civic common ground, such as social networks, widespread civic membership, and daily news consumption have been displaced by the “network society” and social media. This displacement resulted in clusters of shared opinion and self-supporting facts. At the same time, post-industrialization has dimmed the economic prospects of a wide swath of the working and middle classes, especially rural families, magnifying political and cultural differences while adding fuel to unresolved ethnic and racial tensions. Political culture is increasingly defined by competing groups who see each other in zero-sum struggles for unequally distributed resources.

Within this context, this symposium seeks to bring together scholars from Europe and America to consider populism and its relationship to the contemporary communication ecology. We do so with two driving questions in mind: (1) How has growing polarization and fragmentation in the media ecology, as reflected in partisan media, broadcast content, political advertising and social media, contributed to ideological and partisan political divides? (2) Under what conditions does the flow of information in the media ecology encourage citizens across the ideological spectrum to retrench into increasingly homogeneous sub-clusters that amplify highly partisan messages of party leaders and political pundits? The scholars hosting this campus event (Kathy Cramer, Lewis Friedland, Dhavan Shah, Michael Wagner, and Chris Wells) are examining parallel questions by gathering social network, survey, and qualitative data on contentious politics in Wisconsin.

Our goal in inviting a select group of European and American scholars is twofold: (1) to have them share their perspectives on populism and the role of communication in creating the context for its resurgence, and (2) to have these scholars inform the work taking place at the UW-Madison on our efforts to reconstruct a statewide communication ecology of Wisconsin since 2010. This is an essential time to address the question of populism and its communicative roots. Despite deepening concern regarding fractures in civil society and growing political contentiousness in our academic disciplines, truly comparative work and integration of European insights into research in the U.S. context is rare. This symposium hopes to facilitate the understanding of broader features of civil society, politics, governance and mass media, as well as their complex interrelations and breakdown.

European Communication and Populism Invitees:

Toril Aalberg (Norges Teknisk-Naturvitenskapelige Universitet)

Aalberg graduated as Dr. Polit. in Political Science (2001), with emphasis on comparative public opinion studies. Previous work includes comparative studies of public opinion on income inequalities and distributive justice as well as studies on political communication. Fields of interests are the study of media and politics, the role of media in election campaigns as well as how media affects public opinion. Other research interests include media sociology, political psychology and experimental methods.

Linda Bos (Universiteit van Amsterdam)

Linda Bos is Assistant Professor in Political Communication at the Amsterdam School of Communications Research (ASCoR). Linda is a full member of the Center for Politics and Communication. Her research focuses on election campaigns, populism, media use and media effects. More specifically she focuses on populism and/in the media, and media effects on electoral volatility. Currently she represents the Netherlands as a Management Committee Member of the COST Action on "Populist Political Communication in Europe: Comprehending the Challenge of Mediated Political Populism for Democratic Politics".

Sven Engesser (Technische Universität Dresden)

Studied journalism and communication science at the Freie Universität Berlin. PhD at LMU Munich concerning the quality of participatory journalism on the web. Senior Assistant at the University of Zurich before joining TU Dresden. He is a member of the NCCR program (National Center of Competence in Research) "Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century" of the Swiss National Science Foundation, and the COST program (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) "Populist Political Communication in Europe." Conducted the NCCRdemocracy21 research project on populist media coverage and public opinion across 11 countries between March 2014 and May 2015. Currently examining the sources, varieties, and effects of populist communication using these data.

Jörg Matthes (University of Vienna)

Jörg Matthes (PhD, University of Zurich) is professor of communication science at the Department of Communication, University of Vienna, Austria, where he chairs the division of advertising research and media effects. His research focuses on advertising effects, the process of public opinion formation, news framing, and empirical methods. He has published more than 90 articles in national and international journals and his research activities received awards and honors from the German Communication Association, the International Communication Association, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the German Psychological Association, and the World Association for Public Opinion Research. He is also recipient of prestigious top dissertation awards by the German Communication Association, the Faculty of Arts of the University of Zurich, and the Swiss Association for Market and Social Research. He is currently Associate Editor of Human Communication Research, Editor-in-Chief of Communication Methods & Measures, and former Associate Editor of The Journal of Communication.

US Communication and Populism Invitees:**Claes De Vreese (University of Amsterdam, currently visiting Harvard University)**

De Vreese is Professor and Chair of Political Communication and director of the Program Group Political Communication & Journalism in The Amsterdam School of Communication Research ASCoR at the Department of Communication Science, University of Amsterdam. He directs the UvA Research Priority Area Communication. He is the founding Director of the Center for Politics and Communication. He is Affiliated Professor of Political Science and Journalism at the University of Southern Denmark, and is currently Shorenstein Fellow at the Kennedy School, Harvard University. His research interests include comparative journalism research, the effects of news, public opinion and European integration, effects of information and campaigning on elections, referendums and direct democracy. He currently holds an ERC grant titled 'EUROPINIONS' (2015-2020) and is the co-director of the University of Amsterdam Research Priority Area Personalised Communication.

Daniel Kreiss (University of North Carolina)

Kreiss' research explores the impact of technological change on the public sphere and political practice. In his 2012 book from Oxford University Press — "Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama" — Kreiss presents the untold history of new media and Democratic political campaigning over the last decade. The book follows the work of a group of young Internet staffers who came together on the Dean campaign and created a number of innovations in online campaigning. After the elections, Dean's former staffers launched prominent political consulting firms that carried their innovations to many other campaigns, including Obama's bid for the presidency.

Silvio Waisbord (George Washington University)

Silvio Waisbord is a professor in the School of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University, editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Communication* and former editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Press/Politics*. His recent books include *News of Baltimore: Race, Rage and the City* (edited with Linda Steiner, Routledge, 2017), *Routledge Companion to Media and Human Rights* (edited with Howard Tumber, Routledge, 2017), and *Media Movements: Civil Society and Media Policy Reform in Latin America* (with Soledad Segura, Zed, 2016).

Pippa Norris (Harvard University)

Pippa Norris, the Paul F. McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Politics, has taught at Harvard for a quarter century. She is also ARC Laureate Fellow and Professor of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney. A comparative political scientist she focuses on democracy and democratization, public opinion and elections, political communications, and gender politics. She directs The Electoral Integrity Project, which she established in 2012 with a team based at Sydney and Harvard. She is ranked 4th worldwide in political science citations by Google Scholar, with an H index of .84. She is ranked in the top 10% of scholars across all disciplines in papers downloaded from the SSRN.

Populism Specialist Invitees:**Sheri Berman (Professor of Political Science, Barnard College, Columbia University):**

Sheri E. Berman is professor of political science. Her main interests are European politics and political history, democracy and democratization, globalization, and the history of the left. Her two books have examined the role played by social democracy in determining political outcomes in 20th-century Europe. Her courses include Political Development; Making Democracy Work; and Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe. Her current book project, *Democracy and Dictatorship in Europe: From the Ancient Regime to the Present Day*, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

Cas Mudde (University of Georgia)

Professor Mudde is an expert on European politics and the foremost scholar on the far right in western democracies. His book *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2007) won the Stein Rokkan Prize in 2008 and was named an Outstanding Academic Title by Choice in 2008. His co-edited volume *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) was named an Outstanding Academic Title by Choice in 2013. In 2015 he won the Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel Award of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in Germany. His other previous book publications include the readers *Youth and the Extreme Right* (IDEBATE, 2014) and *Political Extremism* (SAGE, 2014, 4 Volumes), the edited volumes *Racist Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe* (Routledge, 2005), *Western Democracies and the New Extreme Right Challenge* (Routledge, 2004), *Uncivil Society? Contentious Politics in Post-Communist Europe* (Routledge, 2003), and the monograph *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester University Press, 2000).

Jan Werner Muller (Princeton University)

Jan-Werner Mueller's research interests include the history of modern political thought, liberalism and its critics, constitutionalism, religion and politics, and the normative dimensions of European integration. He is the author of *Constitutional Patriotism* (Princeton UP, 2007), *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought* (Yale University Press, 2003; German, French, Japanese, Greek, Serbian, and Chinese translations) and *Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification and National Identity* (Yale University Press, 2000; Chinese translation). In addition, he has edited *German Ideologies since 1945: Studies in the Political Thought and Culture of the Bonn Republic* (Palgrave, 2003) and *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge UP, 2002). In 2011 Yale University Press published *Contesting Democracy: Political Ideas in Twentieth Century Europe*. (German, French, Italian, Russian, Chinese, Polish, and Serbian translations).

Theda Skocpol (Harvard University)

Skocpol's work covers an unusually broad spectrum of topics including both comparative politics (*States and Social Revolutions*, 1979) and American politics (*Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*, 1992). Her books and articles have been widely cited in political science literature and have won

numerous awards, including the 1993 Woodrow Wilson Award of the American Political Science Association for the best book in political science for the previous year. Skocpol's research focuses on U.S. social policy and civic engagement in American democracy, including changes since the 1960s. She has recently launched new projects on the development of U.S. higher education and on the transformations of U.S. federal policies in the Obama era.