

# Booming Populism

On the Practice and Language of Political Polarization

Think Lab and Panel Discussion

Columbia Journalism School  
German Center for Research and Innovation (GCRI)  
New York City, November 14-17, 2016



# BOOMING POPULISM

## On the Practice and Language of Political Polarization

In the course of the Brexit referendum and the presidential elections, both the EU and the US have seen a rise of populist political reasoning.

Polarizing, overly simplifying or misleading communications of social, cultural and economic developments dominate current political debates and influence public perceptions of nationhood, inner security and minority politics.

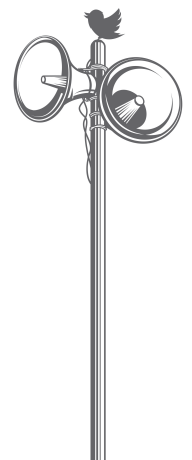
By claiming to speak in the name of the ordinary people, politicians emphasize the direct democratic nature of their doing while at the same time often explicitly excluding certain groups of people from their societal models.

The think lab and panel discussion, taking place in New York City in November 2016, aim at an interdisciplinary analysis of the booming of political populism.

By bringing together social scientists and journalists with diverse areas of expertise, the event will enable a multilayered analysis of the current political implications of populism in its various forms and the role of different – e.g. corporate vs. social – media in the distribution of information and the shaping of public opinion.

Since the topic of political populism and the potential emanating threats to liberal democracies is ultimately relevant on both sides of the Atlantic, the event will fathom to what extent different scientific perspectives – social scientists' and journalists', Europeans' and Americans' – are interrelated or divergent.

A novel event format will ensure a high-profile panel discussion by challenging the renowned experts in the field with questions and hypotheses developed in the think lab of young researchers.



# PROGRAM

Monday-Wednesday, Nov 14-16

---

## Think Lab

PhD fellows of the BIGSSS PhD Program, the ZEIT Foundation's PhD programs, and Columbia Journalism School's Communications PhD Program will participate in the event's think lab.

The aim of this think lab is to develop questions and hypotheses on the topic of political populism. These are to be discussed later with the experts on the panel.

For the think lab, PhD students will be selected who are not primarily working in the specific field. This will ensure different disciplinary, theoretical and empirical approaches to the topic and demonstrate the general critical capacities of young scholars in the humanities and social sciences.

As a side effect, the think lab will provide the PhD fellows with excellent networking opportunities and thus enable the strengthening of transatlantic scientific cooperation.

Thursday, Nov 17

---

## Panel Discussion

The panel will be composed of two political scientists and experts in the field of political theory and populism (Jan-Werner Müller/Princeton and Martin Nonhoff/BIGSSS), a journalist and sociologist (Todd Gitlin/Columbia) and an experienced political practitioner (Tara McGuinness/OMB, tbc).

The panel will be hosted by an expert in the field of migration, security and democratic development (Michael Werz/CAP).

The panel discussion will be opened, however, by the PhD fellows of the preceding think lab: they will present two contrary hypotheses to the panelists and thereby generate a frame for the course of the discussion amongst the experts. Subsequently, the panelist will give short responses, followed by a discussion of the different positions and hypotheses.

In the course of the evening, the PhD fellows and the audience will be welcome to join in the discussion.

# EXPERTS

## Think Lab & Panel Experts

**Andie Tucher**, Columbia Journalism School  
Historian and Journalist, Professor and Director of the Communications PhD Program

**Martin Nonhoff**, BIGSSS/University of Bremen  
Professor of Political Theory

**Michael Werz**, Center for American Progress (CAP)  
Senior Fellow at CAP and Professor at Georgetown University's BMW Center for German and European Studies

**Jan-Werner Müller**, Princeton University  
Professor of Political Theory

**Todd Gitlin**, Columbia University  
Writer and Sociologist, Professor and Chair of the Communications PhD Program

**Tara McGuinness**, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), tbc  
Attorney and Mediator, Senior Advisor to the Director of the OMB and Executive Director of the Community Solutions Team

## Fellows

**PhD fellows** of the BIGSSS PhD Program, the ZEIT Foundation's PhD programs, and Columbia Journalism School's Communications PhD Program

# CONTACT



**Christian Peters**, Managing Director  
BIGSSS - Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences  
email: [cpeters@bigsss-bremen.de](mailto:cpeters@bigsss-bremen.de)  
phone: +49 421 218 66400