

# **Digital Media, Political Polarization and Challenges to Democracy**

An International Symposium

organized by

Institute for Comparative Media and  
Communication Studies

Austrian Academy of Sciences |  
Alpen-Adria University of Klagenfurt

Centre for Political Youth Culture and  
Communication

Department of Sociology | University of York

21-22 September 2017 | Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna

## **Public Lecture**

**W. Lance Bennett**, Department of Political Science, University of Washington

21 September 2017, 18:00 | ORF – The Austrian Broadcasting Corporation

## **Keynote Speakers**

**Michael X. Delli-Carpini**, Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania

**Jörg Matthes**, Department of Communication, University of Vienna

**Barbara Pfetsch**, Institute for Media and Communication Studies, Free University of Berlin

## **Call for Papers**

The forms of communication through which politics is conducted by states and citizens have been, and will continue to be, subject to a constant process of change, which is accelerated by technological innovations. With the rapid rise of digital media, this development has reached a new level. For centuries, processes of political communication used to be primarily linear, with messages transferred from politicians, governments and parties to the media and from the media to the citizens at large. The question here is to what extent and with which societal and political consequences digital media disrupt this linear form.

This question is fueled by growing political distrust, confusion, and conflict throughout the Western world, which seem to shake the democratic system to its foundations. Even those who would not go as far as Colin Crouch when he speaks of the dawning of a “post-democratic” age cannot deny that in many European countries as well as in the United States there is growing criticism of the form of democracy that has emerged in the majority of constitutions and of its leading institutions and methods of procedure. Among young people, turnout at elections is below average for the population as a whole, and it continues to fall. Traditional loyalties are getting weaker, and party membership is in steady decline. Trust in democratic organizations and regulatory mechanisms is on the wane. While traditional center-left and center-right parties are losing ground and are thus struggling for a clear profile, new nationalist movements on the one side, and anti-austerity protests on the other, are emerging. Political polarization becomes a defining feature of society and politics.

The Viennese conference wants to shed light on these developments by exploring the changes to politics triggered, or at least accelerated, by changing media structures and media habits on the one hand, and on the other hand by discussing the challenges to democracy brought about by those changes, as well as the role media might play in responding to these challenges. Thus, the symposium aims at discussing not only the causes and

developments that led to the current state of society, but also proposals for citizens, journalists, media organizations, and politicians for how to manage the current move away from the established structures of representative democracy—with their group-based identities and mainstream issues—towards a wider repertoire of personalized political experience and individually motivated concerns in a digitally networked society.

**Submission and selection of papers.** The call is open to all social sciences. The conference would like to bring together researchers from different backgrounds, including theoretically, methodologically, and practically oriented researchers. Submissions are for 20-minute presentations. The extended abstract may not be longer than 8,000 characters (including spaces). Please add a title page to the abstract containing the name(s) and address(es) of the author(s) and the title of the presentation. Please send your proposal to [cmc@oeaw.ac.at](mailto:cmc@oeaw.ac.at) no later than **April 7, 2017** (as a PDF). All submissions will undergo blind peer review and acceptance notifications will be sent out on **April 28, 2017**.

**Conference attendance.** The conference is open both to presenters and non-presenters, but authors of accepted abstracts are expected to attend the conference and present their work. The conference dinner is scheduled for Friday evening. The participation fee (including welcome reception, lunches, coffee breaks and conference dinner) is EUR 100 / GBP 90 / USD 110. Registration opens on **April 28, 2017**. Please register at [www.oeaw.ac.at/cmc/digital-media](http://www.oeaw.ac.at/cmc/digital-media).

**Conference organizers.**

Maren Beaufort, Austrian Academy of Sciences

Brian D. Loader, University of York

Josef Seethaler, Austrian Academy of Sciences

**Admin:**

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**See for more information:** <http://www.oeaw.ac.at/cmc/digital-media>