

# Political Journalism between Media Change and Democratization from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries

International Conference, University of Bayreuth, June 16–18, 2022.

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When the big social media corporations suspended President Donald Trump's accounts after his supporters had sacked the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, the ongoing international debate about digital media, the rise of populism, and the crisis of 'Western' democracy reached a new climax. It was, however, but the latest round of a discussion on how media and democratic political culture interact with each other that is just as much an integral part of the history of democracy as is the question of what the forms, functions, and legitimacy of political journalism in liberal democracies are. Over the last 250 years, crises and transition periods have always also been key moments of political journalism that triggered these controversies time and again. The positions taken and the answers given were different in the different historical contexts.

Pursuing a historical *longue durée* approach that includes the early modern period, our conference aims at investigating the relationship between media change, political journalism, and processes of democratization from interdisciplinary and transcultural perspectives. We want to scrutinize the interconnection of political journalism and democratization in changing media systems from the seventeenth century to today. We are particularly interested in the historically specific interplay of 'old' and 'new' media that started with the print media in the seventeenth century, and then expanded to include photo journalism in the nineteenth century, radio and television in the twentieth century, and, finally, the new digital media of our own times.

We want to ask, what political journalism and democratization exactly meant under the conditions of a given media system. How did the relationship between historical contexts, notions of democracy, and the specific mediality of the media unfold, and what did this mean for political journalism? Who were the actors? Which discourses emerged, which practices were pursued, and how did the producers and consumers of the media interact? How did journalist define themselves and their role in the public debates? How did all this shape and structure processes of democratization? Which norms and core values generated notions of democracy and drove democratization? To what extent were these norms and values born from the spirit of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment universal or specific to Western mindsets, which were increasingly problematized as such both in the political discourses and the media themselves? How does the relationship between democratization, mass media, and populism represent itself from a long-term historical perspective?

Our focus will be on key moments of democratization in different world regions and historical epochs that also reveal mid- and long-term historical processes.

Such key moments include the Glorious Revolution of 1688/89, the French and the Atlantic Revolutions, the Revolutions of 1848, the twentieth-century's age of world wars, the postcolonial movements, or the Watergate affair (1972-1974) We also welcome presentations on current situations and events such as the Arab Spring, the movement for democracy in Hong Kong, or the recent developments in Myanmar.

We invite proposals on relevant topics from the field of historiography and media studies, but we also accept contributions from other disciplines such as literary criticism, political science, or sociology. Proposals of not more than 800 words should be sent to [susanne.lachenicht@uni-bayreuth.de](mailto:susanne.lachenicht@uni-bayreuth.de) no later than May 31, 2021. They should include a short CV, give an outline of the proposed paper, and reflect its relevance regarding the conference's key concepts of media change and democratization

Our conference will take place in Bayreuth, Germany, from June 16 to 18, 2022. Conference languages will be German, English, and French.