

University of Erfurt
13 – 15 November 2025

**Annual Conference of the International and Intercultural Communication
Division of the DGPuK (German Communication Association)**

Call for Papers

***Populist Backlashes around the World:
The Role of Media and Communication***

The world is witnessing a time of political backlashes and renewed power claims by illiberal populist forces. This crisis is noticeable both in the global North and South and pervades various political formations ranging from democracies to hybrid and autocratic political systems. Right-wing populism in such different places as the US, Europe, Brazil and India, polarization in electoral democracies during the Arab Spring, hard-authoritarian backlashes as in Russia, China or Myanmar and religious-ethnic fundamentalism as in Indonesia are different types of the same phenomenon of political backlashes. Populist backlashes in particular are obviously reflected in democratic rollbacks to authoritarianism, but they can also take the form of more subtle erosions of human rights, liberal values and challenges to dignity, decency and tolerance in free or partly free political systems.

Even if the media is based on the principle of free speech, as a societal subsystem it can become a co-party of populist backlashes if it is negligent to defend human rights or does not counter processes such as tabloidization, misinformation, misrepresentation or hate speech. Moreover, the representation function of legacy media becomes disregarded when minorities still lack access to fair public representation while illiberal forces with their conflict-driven populist news values tend to be overrepresented. In turn, the so-called “social media” has not fulfilled the euphoric promise of its compensatory function for minority groups as they lend themselves to hate speech and polarization all too easily and as they are limited by often untransparent platform logics.

There are also further dynamics, which enhance disruptive tendencies within societies: For example, social and political cleavages reflected in media discourses and effects, which can be manipulated by political elites and counter-elites for divide-and-rule political games, or communication cultures, which can be challenged by lacks of media literacy, deficits in societal participation or their own uncertainties in dealing with global, multi-/and transcultural realities, which can obviously be captured by populist politics.

The conference aims to reflect on the multifaceted role of media and communication in contemporary backlashes by considering and comparing examples and perspectives from around the world. Contributions can focus on the following thematic issues in an international or transcultural perspective:

- *Populist media coverage (e.g. racist, sexist etc. stereotyping and misrepresentation)*
- *Populist political interventions into media*
- *The role of law, accountability and (co-)regulation frameworks*
- *The role of commercial and ownership structures in populist backlashes*
- *Media ethics and their role to counter populism*
- *Populist public spheres and counter public spheres, including legacy and new media*
- *Communication culture and populism, including mediated and non-mediated phenomena.*

The conference includes an international keynote session and roundtable discussion as well as regular thematic panels. The panels will be organized in the form of a combination of paper presentations and subsequent dialogic and moderated roundtable formats, which will give enough time to deepen the academic conversation beyond mere requests.

To support early career scholars in the field of international comparative, cosmopolitan and/or transcultural media and communication research, the conference includes a PhD world café. Here, up to three PhD candidates each will be given the chance to get into an intense thematic f2f-discussion with two expert academics in their respective field.

The conference will start on Thursday evening with a get together, it will include a conference dinner on Friday evening and will end around Saturday lunchtime.

Submission of Papers

Please send your proposal for a **20-minute** presentation to the organizers (**project.backlashes@uni-erfurt.de**) no later than **June 30, 2025** (using a single pdf file). The abstract should not exceed 7000 characters (including blank spaces). Submissions for the conference should be made in English.

Please add a title page to the abstract containing the *name(s)* and *address(es)* of the presenter(s), the *title* of the presentation, the prioritized *thematic area* and up to three *keywords*. All submissions for panel presentations will be anonymously peer-re-viewed by members of the international and intercultural division of the DGPK according to the criteria of originality, relevance, theoretical foundation, appropriateness of the methods used (if applicable), clarity, and reference to the conference theme. Presentations can have a theoretical or conceptual character, or they can be empirical in nature. In any case, they should reflect an international comparative, international and/or transcultural aspect in the area of the overarching conference theme.

Submission for PhD World Café

Submissions for the PhD world café should include PhD projects that explicitly deal with global, international, or transcultural questions, but these do not necessarily have to be linked to the conference topic. Interdisciplinary junctions are possible; however, the projects should primarily be based in media and communication studies. The abstract should take the form of a short *exposé* including an explanation of the *research question*, an overview of the *theoretical and methodological approach(es)* and a short description of the *current status quo*. Candidates should also indicate questions they would like to discuss with experts in the field. Submissions need to be sent to the conference Email (see below) no later than June 30, 2025.

Conference Registration and Venue

Presenters and PhD candidates will be informed by **August 31, 2025**, about the outcome of the selection process. Registration for the conference will be open by **September 15, 2025**. The conference will take place at the premises of University of Erfurt. Updated information about the conference are available at the conference website (see below).

Organization

Prof. Dr. Kai Hafez, University of Erfurt

Dr. Anne Grüne, University of Erfurt

Contact

Conference Email: project.backlashes@uni-erfurt.de

Conference Website:



Dr. Anne Grüne
University of Erfurt
Department of Media and Communication Studies
C18.02.25
Alfred-Weber-Platz 4
99089 Erfurt