

## THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

# FELLOWSHIP CALL – DEPOLARIZING PUBLIC DEBATES: DEVELOPING TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNICATION

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### RESEARCH QUESTION

How can we depolarize public debates on socio-ecological transformations?

### PROJECT FOR WHICH WE ARE SEEKING FELLOWS

Radical socio-ecological transformations of our societies require an open and inclusive public debate. Such a debate will involve conflicts as part of the democratic process, but under certain conditions, controversies run the risk of falling victim to an untamed process of polarization. Polarization means the splitting of society into groups who disagree on the most basic questions and no longer regard each other as legitimate participants in a common debate. Polarization is neither a universal nor natural phenomenon, which raises questions about the factors that drive it. In this project, we focus on digital media networks and news coverage as key drivers of polarization by, among other things, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of polarizing societies.

The existential and normative question of how society should transform to tackle global ecological challenges is an utterly relevant case to study how polarization unfolds in communication. We will study polarization in the content of news media, in digital media networks and in unmediated political communication – looking at how these different arenas influence each other.

In phase one, we will develop a **polarization barometer** (spring/summer 2023), a combination of qualitative and automated tools to measure polarization through content and network analysis. With this in place, we will identify **factors of depolarization** (Fall 2023). In the third phase, we aim to develop a **toolbox for depolarization**, engaging both with the science of polarization and practitioners from the spheres of journalism, digital platforms and civil society (Winter and Spring 2024).

### RESPONSIBLE PROGRAM CHAIR

Prof. Dr. Michael Brüggemann (invited)

## FACTS & FIGURES

Location:	Hamburg, Germany
Deadline:	16 February 2023
Selection meeting:	15 and 16 March 2023 (in Hamburg)
Decisions:	22 March 2023
Funding period:	Fellows can apply for either one, two, or three terms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Fall term: Sep 18 – Dec 15, 2023</li><li>- Winter term: Jan 15 – March 29, 2024</li><li>- Spring term: May 2 – June 28, 2024</li></ul>

## ABOUT THE NEW INSTITUTE

On the basis of humanistic and social-scientific reflection on human becoming in the 21st century, THE NEW INSTITUTE develops concrete visions of future socio-economic and political realities. We gather thinkers and practitioners with interdisciplinary and intercultural backgrounds in academia, politics, business, media, the arts, and technology around projects that effect positive social change.

## WHO ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

Scholars from the humanities and social sciences or practitioners in politics, business, art, media, or journalism with a commitment to the mission of THE NEW INSTITUTE, expertise in a field related to one of our projects, and interest in collaborating across our programs. Individuals with expertise in the empirical study of communication and media, e.g., with backgrounds in communication and digital media research, political science, psychology, and sociology or sustainability studies are especially encouraged to apply. Practitioners from different sectors (journalism, digital media, civil society, business, politics) who would like to contribute to developing the depolarization toolbox in the final phase (Winter and spring term 2024) are also invited to apply.

## WHAT DO FELLOWS DO?

Actively participate in the collaborative fellow work on the questions of our projects.

## HOW DO I APPLY?

Letter of motivation (3 pages max.); CV, including current address, nationality, gender; statement of career level; proposal for a project in accordance with the call (3-5 pages max.). More details are available on our [Fellowship](#) page. Please send your application as a single pdf to [programs@thenew.institute](mailto:programs@thenew.institute).