TRUTH, WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

EDMO BELUX LUNCH LECTURE,
MAY 16TH 2023

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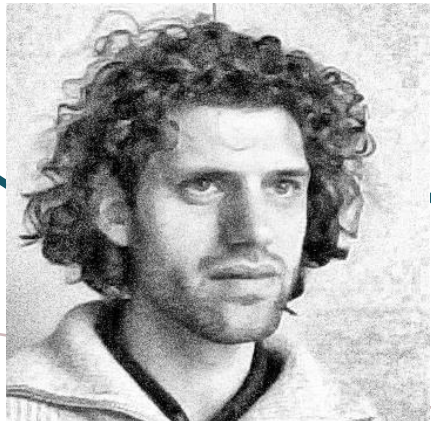
EEN VRAAG NAAR WAARHEID

VUBPRESS

Hannah Oorts, EUTOPIA
Representative claims, performance

Louise Knops (post-doc)
and Lien Smets,
NOTLIKEUS
Political Indignation,
Affective polarisation
Place based politics

Sophie Smit, G-EPIC
Civic education, gender-inequality in classrooms

Jouke Huijzer TA
Left-wing politics, hegemony

Kevin Meyvaert, REDIRECT
Brussels youth, ontological insecurity

TRUTH, WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

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TRUTH, AN AMBIGUOUS RELATION

- **An ingrained desire for truth**
  - 'to always speak the truth'
  - 'to solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'
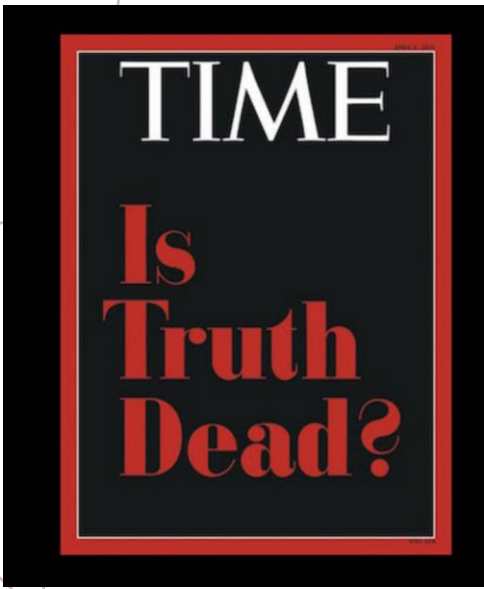 - 'the truth will set us free'
  - 'we need to face the facts'

- **…. or not?**
  - 'the facts don't speak for themselves'
  - 'a little white lie never hurt anyone'

POLITICS AND TRUTH-SPEAKING

- **Paradoxes of political ethics**: from Machiavelli to the problem of dirty hands

- **Political ideologies: facts + beliefs**
  - **Facts** = actually existing events or social patterns evidenced via methods of scientific rigour
  - **Truth** = a state or quality of being true, which is in accordance with facts
  - **Belief** = what you believe to be true and the type of knowledge you are receptive to

- **Political pluralism: founded on different ways of "seeing the world"**
  - **Political diagnosis (facts) --- prognosis (interpretation, anticipation)**

THE POST-TRUTH CONDITION

- **A misleading term:** nostalgia and glorification of the past

- **A changed attitude towards the authority of established knowledge**
  - Disagreement about verifiable facts and well-established scientific claims
  - A tendency to place personal belief above facts

- **Diagnosis-prognosis**
  - Post-modernism?
    - No "universal truth" --- promotion of moral relativism
    - Instead, takes position against *pensée unique* ---- entanglement power / knowledge production
  - All about technology?
    - Online echo chambers, circulation of misinformation, fragmentation and polarisation of information; personalisation algorithms
    - Fact-checking, regulation of social media platforms, improving digital literacy and critical thinking

an je horen

Fact Check

Check
Check: Nee, Google Maps heeft Palestina niet geschrapt. Het heeft er nooi

Op de sociale media doet sinds kort het gerucht de ronde, en ook verschille
waaronder Arab News, pikten het op. Maar het klopt niet.

vr 17 jul 2020 🕐 18:18

Check
CHECK: klimaatdocumentaire Michael Moore heeft soms een punt, meesta
en misleidende informatie

Legt de docu van Michael Moore enkele ongemakkelijke waarheden bloot, c
gde enkele claims voor a...

Latest Fact Checks

Technology

Strengthen Media Literacy to Win the Fight Against Misinformation

If the world is going to stop deliberate or unintentional misinformation and its insidious effects, we need to radically expand and accelerate our counterattacks, particularly human-centered solutions focused on improving people's media and information literacy.

Does King Charles' Scepter Contain Controversial 'Great Star of Africa' Diamond?

Written by: *Nur Ibrahim*

May 15, 2023

Critics of the royal family believe the gem represents British colonization, claiming it was "st ...

Read more

DIGITAL LITERACY

CRITICAL THINKING AND EVALUATION
E-SAFETY
CULTURAL AND SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING
COLLABORATION
CURATE INFORMATION
PROFICIENT COMMUNICATOR
CREATIVITY
PRACTICAL AND FUNCTIONAL SKILLS

factcheck. vlaanderen

Poynter.

NEWS   TRAINING   ETHICS & LEADERSHIP   FACT-CHECKING   MEDIA LITERACY
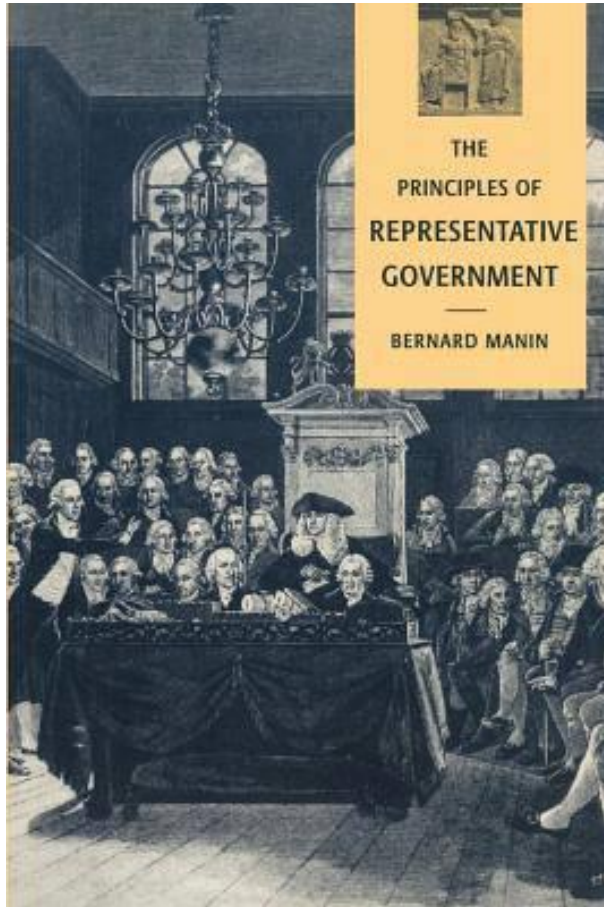
BENEDMO

Vlaams-Nederlandse samenwerking tegen desinformatie, voor en door factcheckers, mediaprofessionals, wetenschappers en andere experts
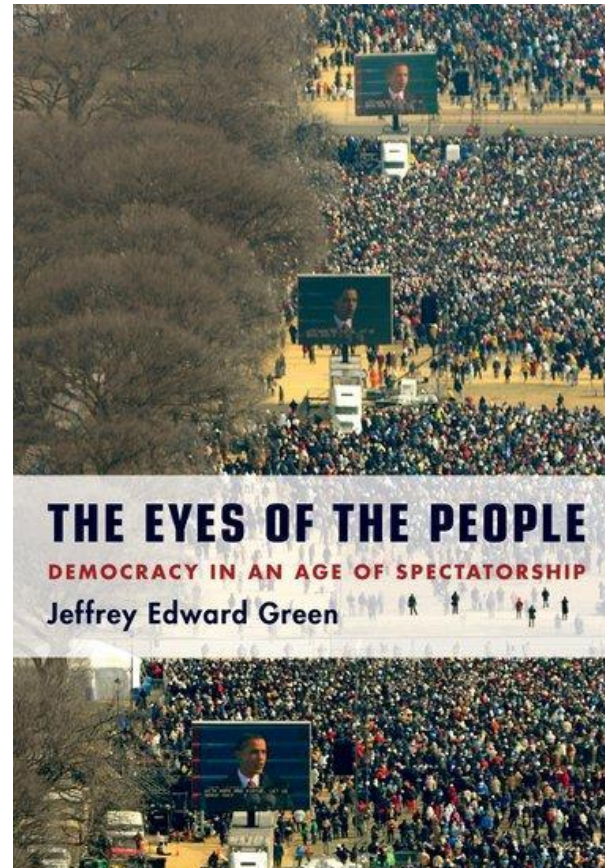
THE RELEVANCE OF FACT-CHECKING

- **Disclaimer: Academic research and under-sampling of lower educated groups**

- **The internet generation: a shift from biological to "transactive" memory**

"People for whom searching for information online is second nature do not need as much political information stored in their biological memories because they are able to access that information in their digital memories. These findings are consistent with psychological research that conceptualizes people's use of the internet as a kind of external or "transactive" memory (Sparrow et al., Reference Sparrow, Liu and Wegner2011). Accordingly, people are better at remembering *where* to find information than the information itself if they expect to be able to find it later—even if this makes them think that they are more knowledgeable than they actually are (Fisher et al., Reference Fisher, Goddu and Keil2015; Ward, Reference Ward2021)."
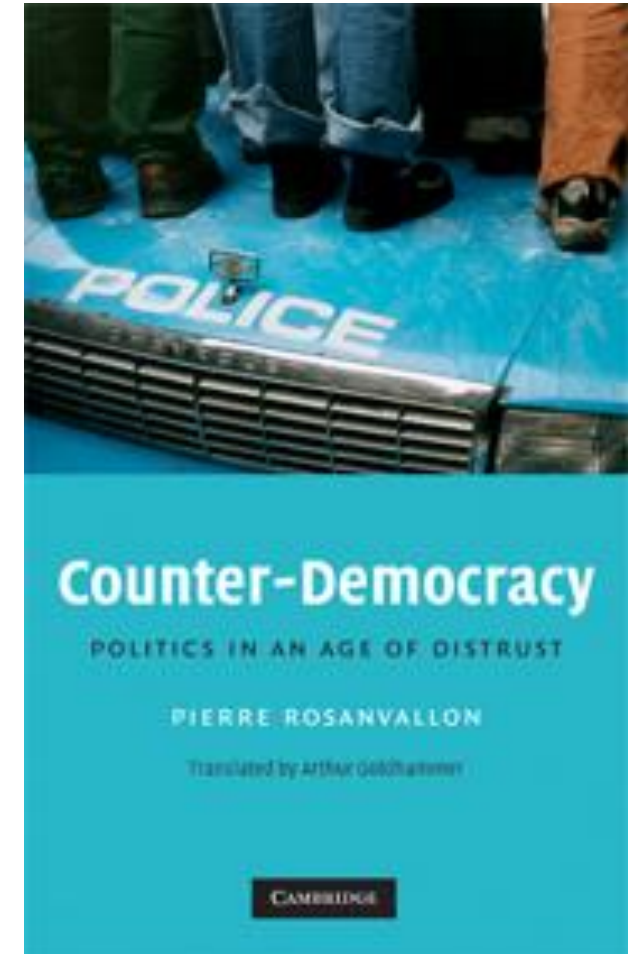
- Guess & Munger (2023)

THE
PRINCIPLES OF
REPRESENTATIVE
GOVERNMENT

BERNARD MANIN

THE EYES OF THE PEOPLE
DEMOCRACY IN AN AGE OF SPECTATORSHIP
Jeffrey Edward Green

Counter-Democracy
POLITICS IN AN AGE OF DISTRUST

PIERRE ROSANVALLON

Translated by Arthur Goldhammer

CAMBRIDGE

Can you trust your MP?

Our politicians owe us the truth. What's your MP's track record on honest politics?

Postcode   **Find my MP**

Of the 25 MPs we've asked to correct themselves this year, 6 have done so

What we do

We fight bad information in different ways. First, **we fact check claims made by politicians, public institutions and journalists, as well as viral content online**. We all deserve information we can trust.

We follow up on our fact checks. By asking people to correct the record when they get things wrong, we can stop and reduce the spread of bad information.

We're developing world-leading technology and **new research** to spot repeated claims, and find out how bad information can be tackled at a global scale.

And we campaign for change that will make bad information rarer and less harmful. Updating our election laws to protect against misleading claims online, for example.

Democracy is not a spectator sport, it's a participatory event. If we don't participate in it, it ceases to be a democracy.

Michael Moore

Burnout in Trump's America

By Diane Hessan   March 7, 2018, 12:35 p.m.

The Boston Globe

THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigour, journalistic flair

Burn out: the emotional toll of being a politician revealed
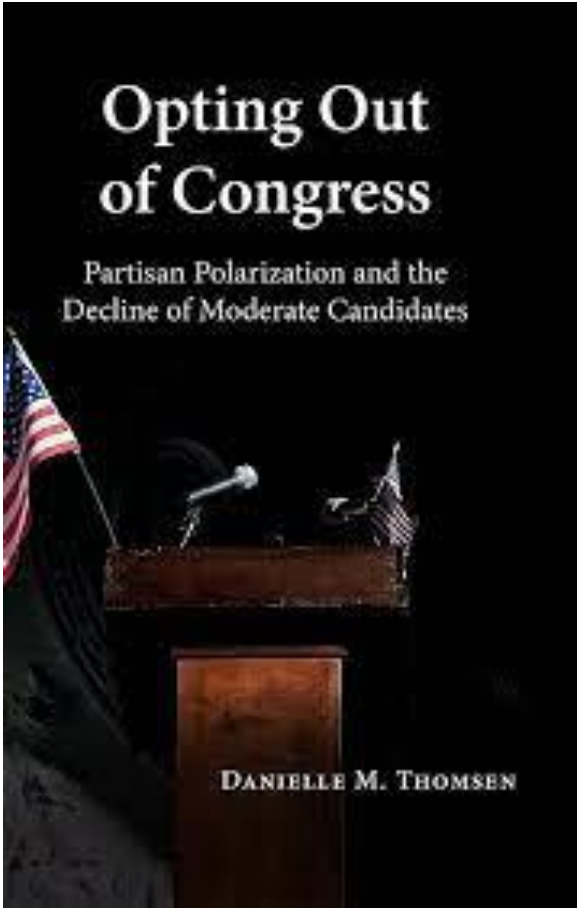
Published: October 29, 2020 1.04pm CET

Opting Out of Congress

Partisan Polarization and the Decline of Moderate Candidates

DANIELLE M. THOMSEN

How to Manage Election Stress & Prevent Political Burnout

talkspace

Written by Reina Gattuso · Oct 27, 2020

SPECTATOR DEMOCRACY

- **Public scrutiny transforms politics**
  - "In theatre, the audience regulates the performance" – Bertold Brecht

  - "All of our acts, even the simplest (…) become strained when we appear (…) before a public (…). That is why it is necessary to correct ourselves and learn again how to walk, sit, or lie down. It is essential to re-educate ourselves (…) on the stage" – Constantin Stanislavski

- **Outcome: political candour or political hypocrisy and hatred ?**

- **Anomalies of the theatre metaphor**
  - **'[w]hen we keep ourselves in the dark,** the consequence is that **we convert the other into a character and make the world a stage for him**. There is fictional existence with a vengeance' (Cavell 2003/1987, 104)
  - **Good watching** : spectators must reveal themselves to political actors (Fitzgerald 2011); spectators assist in politicians' performances
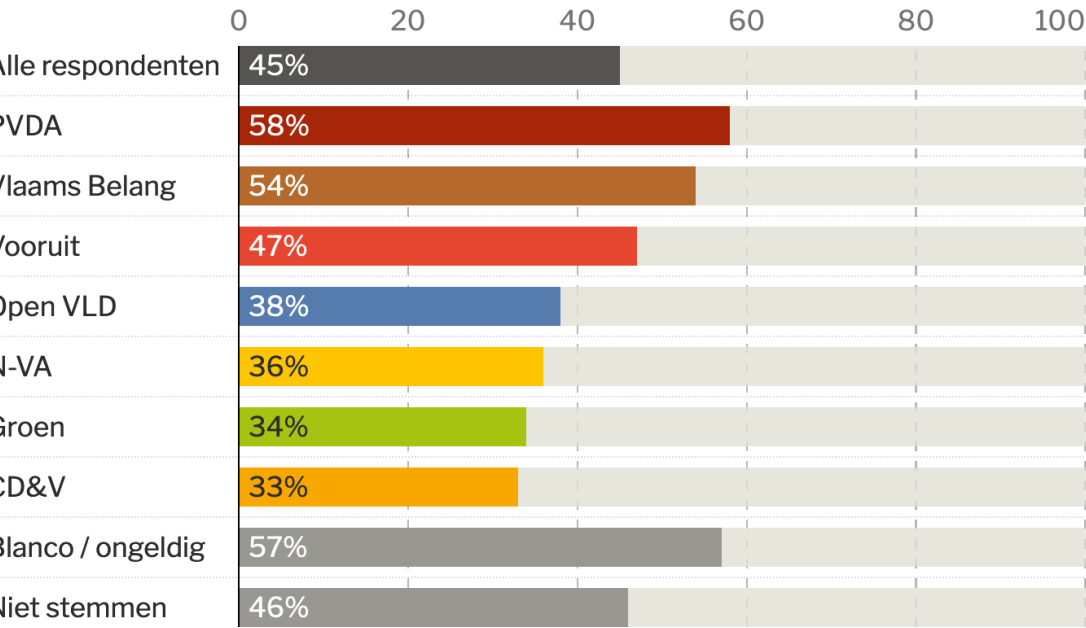
95% = 1/2

ONTOLOGICAL INSECURITY

- Multi-crisis
- A sequence of "once in a lifetime events"
- Inflamed feelings of victimhood
- Affective polarisation

Gevoel van verarming stuwt kiezers richting extremen

Gisteren om 05:00 door **Simon Andries**

De Standaard

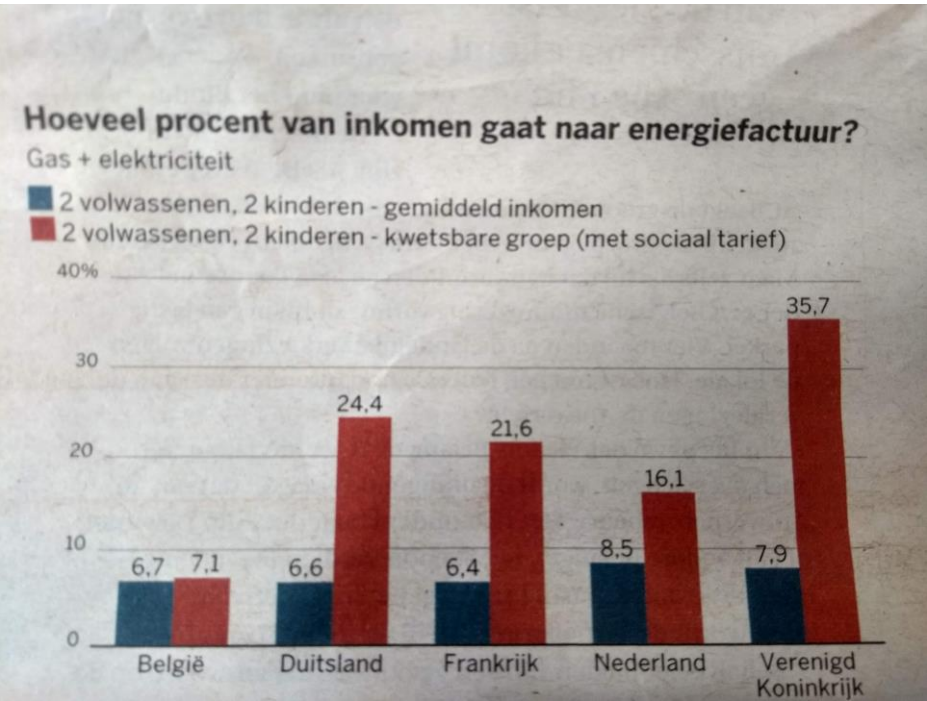**Mensen die vinden dat de economische toestand van hun eigen huishouden in de laatste 12 maanden verslechterd is (%)**

	%
Alle respondenten	45%
PVDA	58%
Vlaams Belang	54%
Vooruit	47%
Open VLD	38%
N-VA	36%
Groen	34%
CD&V	33%
Blanco / ongeldig	57%
Niet stemmen	46%

DS-Infografiek | Bron: De Stemming 2023

Nergens in Europa gaan werknemers er meer op vooruit dan in België

Gisteren om 13:00 door **Ruben Mooijman**

Hoeveel procent van inkomen gaat naar energiefactuur?

Gas + elektriciteit

- 2 volwassenen, 2 kinderen - gemiddeld inkomen
- 2 volwassenen, 2 kinderen - kwetsbare groep (met sociaal tarief)

Land	Gemiddeld inkomen	Kwetsbare groep
België	6,7	7,1
Duitsland	6,6	24,4
Frankrijk	6,4	21,6
Nederland	8,5	16,1
Verenigd Koninkrijk	7,9	35,7

TRUTH AS A FUNCTION OF TRUST

- **Truth, or the ability to establish a shared account of reality, crucially depends on trust**

- **Trust is impaired**
  - Conspiracy theories and anti-system thinking as critiques/ feelings of powerlessness rather than evidence of indoctrination of the "gullible mass"
  - Feelings of misrepresentation: Do dominant discourses reflect people's interests or those of influential elites?

Whose truth is it anyway?

And who benefits from a particular representation of reality?

TRUTH AS A FUNCTION OF TRUST

- **Authenticity and the attractiveness of political "misfits"**

'...the **populist parties** I have studied in this research, however, redefined objective truth as authenticity. When they pronounced the elite to be liars and themselves to be truthful, they spoke of consistency between liars and themselves to be truthful, they spoke of consistency between situation and performance. **They were unconcerned with factuality. The political reality that they described was objectively true by virtue of their authenticity.** The authentic truth that they thus invoked came in two forms: self-connected authenticity, which denoted the performer being true to him- or herself, and responsive authenticity, according to which performers were true to the feelings, values, and experiences of democracy of those they claimed to represent.' (Lone Sorensen 2021, 284)

TRUTH AS A FUNCTION OF TRUST

- **Status loss and our willingness to accept lying demagogues**

'Hahl et al. (2018) researched **how it is possible that a constituency of voters find certain candidates 'authentically appealing' even though they are 'lying demagogues', i.e. people who deliberately tell lies and appeal to non-normative private prejudices**. Their analyses demonstrate that citizens who conceive representative democracy as undergoing a crisis of legitimacy **and who situate themselves amongst groups in society who are losing status (i.e. are less serviced by the establishment), are willing to place perceived authenticity above other values, such as truth speaking and honesty.** Their findings are supported by other studies who find that **especially discontented citizens regard their politicians as culturally distant 'others' who are insensitive to the lived experiences of ordinary people** and who evidence feelings of superiority (Noordzij et al. 2020). Similarly, Enli and Rosenberg (2019) show that voters tend to evaluate populist politicians as more authentic than traditional politicians'

(Severs & Meier forthcoming)

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

22 MAY 2023
POINCARE BOOK
LAUNCH

MORE INFO HERE