

# **Battling with Words or Fists? Changing Modes of Participation in Political Meetings in Britain and Germany (1867-1914)**

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## Abstract

Narratives about the development of political meetings around the turn of the 20th century have focused on the figure of the 'great orator', while audiences were often understood to have been disciplined into progressively passive consumers on the 'political mass market' (Rosenberg 1967). Against this one-sided image, this contribution approaches the political meeting in Germany and Britain as an interactive arena, considering the roles of speakers, debaters, audiences, and outsiders. Building on research on France (Cossart 2010), it traces the gradual shift from a deliberative mode (encompassing discussion-speakers from different parties and argumentative exchanges with an heterogeneous audience) to one more focused on demonstrative functions (with a keynote speaker, loudly supported by an increasingly homogenized audience). Rather than resulting in passivity, however, this shift pushed audiences and outsiders into new modes of a politics of disruption, ranging from heckling to violent disturbance. Although such practices were denounced by opponents as a decline of political culture, they were just as often recognized as a legitimate part of politics, understood not only as a war of words, but also as a performative struggle for public presence and media attention. Comparing British and German cases, the contribution reconsiders the changing modes of political participation before the First World War.

## Author information

**Theo Jung** studied history and philosophy in Leiden and Berlin. His dissertation on the emergence of modern discourses of decadence in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was published in 2012. Since then, his research has increasingly focused on practices of political communication in France, Britain and Germany during the long nineteenth century. He is currently finishing a major research monograph on the meaning(s) of silence in nineteenth-century European politics.

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**Monday, 21 June** - Session 9 - **9,00-10,30 CET (Webex)** - Panel – *“Political Participation” in Democracy History: A Contested and Ever-Changing Concept and Practice?*

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